THE ARMOURER'S PRENTICES

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PREFACE.

I HAVE attempted here to sketch citizen life in the early Tudor days, aided therein by Stowe's *Survey of London*, supplemented by Mr. Loftie's excellent history, and Dr. Burton's *English Merchants*.

Stowe gives a full account of the relations of apprentices to their masters; though I confess that I do not know whether Edmund Burgess could have become a citizen of York after serving an apprenticeship in London. Evil May Day is closely described in Hall's *Chronicle*. The ballad, said to be by Churchill, a contemporary, does not agree with it in all respects; but the story-teller may surely have license to follow whatever is most suitable to the purpose. The sermon is exactly as given by Hall, who is also responsible for the description of the King's sports and of the Field of the Cloth of Gold and of

Ardres. Knight's admirable *Pictorial History of England* tells of Barlow, the archer, dubbed by Henry VIII. the King of Shoreditch.

Historic Winchester describes both St. Elizabeth College and the Archer Monks of Hyde Abbey. The tales mentioned as told by Ambrose to Dennet are really New Forest legends.

The Moresco's Arabic Gospel and Breviary are mentioned in Lady Calcott's *History of Spain*, but she does not give her authority. Nor can I go further than Knight's *Pictorial History* for the King's adventure in the marsh. He does not say where it happened, but as in Stowe's map "Dead Man's Hole" appears in what is now Regent's Park, the marsh was probably deep enough in places for the adventure there. Brand's *Popular Antiquities* are the authority for the nutting in St. John's Wood on Holy Cross Day. Indeed, in some country parishes I have heard that boys still think they have a license to crack nuts at church on the ensuing Sunday.

Seebohm's *Oxford Reformers* and the *Life of Sir Thomas More*, written by William Roper, are my other authorities, though I touched somewhat unwillingly

on ground already lighted up by Miss Manning in her *Household of Sir Thomas More.*

Galt's *Life of Cardinal Wolsey* afforded the description of his household taken from his faithful Cavendish, and likewise the story of Patch the Fool. In fact, a large portion of the whole book was built on that anecdote.

I mention all this because I have so often been asked my authorities in historical tales, that I think people prefer to have what the French appropriately call *pièces justificatives.*

C. M. Yonge.

August 1*st*, 1884.

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CHAPTER I.

THE VERDURER'S LODGE.

"Give me the poor allottery my father left me by testament, with that I will go buy me fortunes."

"Get you with him, you old dog."

As You Like It.

THE officials of the New Forest have ever since the days of the Conqueror enjoyed some of the pleasantest dwellings that southern England can boast.

The home of the Birkenholt family was not one of the least delightful. It stood at the foot of a rising ground, on which grew a grove of magnificent beeches, their large silvery boles rising majestically like columns into a lofty vaulting of branches, covered above with tender

green foliage. Here and there the shade beneath was broken by the gilding of a ray of sunshine on a lower twig, or on a white trunk, but the floor of the vast arcades was almost entirely of the russet brown of the fallen leaves, save where a fern or holly bush made a spot of green. At the foot of the slope lay a stretch of pasture ground, some parts covered by "lady-smocks, all silver white," with the course of the little stream through the midst indicated by a perfect golden river of shining kingcups interspersed with ferns. Beyond lay tracts of brown heath and brilliant gorse and broom, which stretched for miles and miles along the flats, while the dry ground was covered with holly brake, and here and there woods of oak and beech made a sea of verdure, purpling in the distance.

Cultivation was not attempted, but hardy little ponies, cows, goats, sheep, and pigs were feeding, and picking their way about in the marshy mead below, and a small garden of pot-herbs, inclosed by a strong fence of timber, lay on the sunny side of a spacious rambling forest lodge, only one story high, built of solid timber and roofed with shingle. It was not without strong pretensions to beauty, as well as to picturesqueness, for

the posts of the door, the architecture of the deep porch, the frames of the latticed windows, and the verge boards were all richly carved in grotesque devices. Over the door was the royal shield, between a pair of magnificent antlers, the spoils of a deer reported to have been slain by King Edward IV., as was denoted by the "glorious sun of York" carved beneath the shield.

In the background among the trees were ranges of stables and kennels, and on the grass-plat in front of the windows was a row of beehives. A tame doe lay on the little green sward, not far from a large rough deer-hound, both close friends who could be trusted at large. There was a mournful dispirited look about the hound, evidently an aged animal, for the once black muzzle was touched with grey, and there was a film over one of the keen beautiful eyes, which opened eagerly as he pricked his ears and lifted his head at the rattle of the door latch. Then, as two boys came out, he rose, and with a slowly waving tail, and a wistful appealing air, came and laid his head against one of the pair who had appeared in the porch. They were lads of fourteen and fifteen, clad in suits of new mourning, with the short belted doublet, puffed hose, small ruffs and little round

caps of early Tudor times. They had dark eyes and hair, and honest open faces, the younger ruddy and sunburnt, the elder thinner and more intellectual—and they were so much the same size that the advantage of age was always supposed to be on the side of Stephen, though he was really the junior by nearly a year. Both were sad and grave, and the eyes and cheeks of Stephen showed traces of recent floods of tears, though there was more settled dejection on the countenance of his brother.

"Ay, Spring," said the lad, "'tis winter with thee now. A poor old rogue! Did the new housewife talk of a halter because he showed his teeth when her ill-nurtured brat wanted to ride on him? Nay, old Spring, thou shalt share thy master's fortunes, changed though they be. Oh, father! father! didst thou guess how it would be with thy boys!" And throwing himself on the grass, he hid his face against the dog and sobbed.

"Come, Stephen, Stephen; 'tis time to play the man! What are we to do out in the world if you weep and wail?"

"She might have let us stay for the month's mind," was heard from Stephen.

"Ay, and though we might be more glad to go, we might carry bitterer thoughts along with us. Better be done with it at once, say I."

"There would still be the Forest! And I saw the moorhen sitting yester eve! And the wild ducklings are out on the pool, and the woods are full of song. Oh! Ambrose! I never knew how hard it is to part——"

"Nay, now, Steve, where be all your plots for bravery? You always meant to seek your fortune—not bide here like an acorn for ever."

"I never thought to be thrust forth the very day of our poor father's burial, by a shrewish town-bred vixen, and a base narrow-souled——"

"Hist! hist!" said the more prudent Ambrose.

"Let him hear who will! He cannot do worse for us than he has done! All the Forest will cry shame on him for a mean-hearted skinflint to turn his brothers from their home, ere their father and his, be cold in his grave," cried Stephen, clenching the grass with his hands, in his passionate sense of wrong.

"That's womanish," said Ambrose.

"Who'll be the woman when the time comes for drawing cold steel?" cried Stephen, sitting up.

At that moment there came through the porch a man, a few years over thirty, likewise in mourning, with a paler, sharper countenance than the brothers, and an uncomfortable pleading expression of self-justification.

"How now, lads!" he said, "what means this passion? You have taken the matter too hastily. There was no thought that ye should part till you had some purpose in view. Nay, we should be fain for Ambrose to bide on here, so he would leave his portion for me to deal with, and teach little Will his primer and accidence. You are a quiet lad, Ambrose, and can rule your tongue better than Stephen."

"Thanks, brother John," said Ambrose, somewhat sarcastically, "but where Stephen goes I go."

"I would—I would have found Stephen a place among the prickers or rangers, if—" hesitated John. "In sooth, I would yet do it, if he would make it up with the housewife."

"My father looked higher for his son than a pricker's office," returned Ambrose.

"That do I wot," said John, "and therefore, 'tis for his own good that I would send him forth. His

godfather, our uncle Birkenholt, he will assuredly provide for him, and set him forth——"

The door of the house was opened, and a shrewish voice cried, "Mr. Birkenholt, here, husband! You are wanted. Here's little Kate crying to have yonder smooth pouch to stroke, and I cannot reach it for her."

"Father set store by that otter-skin pouch, for poor Prince Arthur slew the otter," cried Stephen. "Surely, John, you'll not let the babes make a toy of that?"

John made a helpless gesture, and at a renewed call, went indoors.

"You are right, Ambrose," said Stephen, "this is no place for us. Why should we tarry any longer to see everything moiled and set at nought? I have couched in the forest before, and 'tis summer time."

"Nay," said Ambrose, "we must make up our fardels and have our money in our pouches before we can depart. We must tarry the night, and call John to his reckoning, and so might we set forth early enough in the morning to lie at Winchester that night and take counsel with our uncle Birkenholt."

"I would not stop short at Winchester," said Stephen.

"London for me, where uncle Randall will find us preferment!"

"And what wilt do for Spring!"

"Take him with me, of course!" exclaimed Stephen. "What! would I leave him to be kicked and pinched by Will, and hanged belike by Mistress Maud?"

"I doubt me whether the poor old hound will brook the journey."

"Then I'll carry him!"

Ambrose looked at the big dog as if he thought it would be a serious undertaking, but he had known and loved Spring as his brother's property ever since his memory began, and he scarcely felt that they could be separable for weal or woe.

The verdurers of the New Forest were of gentle blood, and their office was well-nigh hereditary. The Birkenholts had held it for many generations, and the reversion passed as a matter of course to the eldest son of the late holder, who had newly been laid in the burial ground of Beaulieu Abbey. John Birkenholt, whose mother had been of knightly lineage, had resented his father's second marriage with the daughter

of a yeoman on the verge of the Forest, suspected of a strain of gipsy blood, and had lived little at home, becoming a sort of agent at Southampton for business connected with the timber which was yearly cut in the Forest to supply material for the shipping. He had wedded the daughter of a person engaged in law business at Southampton, and had only been an occasional visitor at home, ever after the death of his stepmother. She had left these two boys, unwelcome appendages in his sight. They had obtained a certain amount of education at Beaulieu Abbey, where a school was kept, and where Ambrose daily studied, though for the last few months Stephen had assisted his father in his forest duties.

Death had come suddenly to break up the household in the early spring of 1515, and John Birkenholt had returned as if to a patrimony, bringing his wife and children with him. The funeral ceremonies had been conducted at Beaulieu Abbey on the extensive scale of the sixteenth century, the requiem, the feast, and the dole, all taking place there, leaving the Forest lodge in its ordinary quiet.

It had always been understood that on their father's

death the two younger sons must make their own way in the world; but he had hoped to live until they were a little older, when he might himself have started them in life, or expressed his wishes respecting them to their elder brother. As it was, however, there was no commendation of them, nothing but a strip of parchment, drawn up by one of the monks of Beaulieu, leaving each of them twenty crowns, with a few small jewels and properties left by their own mother, while everything else went to their brother.

There might have been some jealousy excited by the estimation in which Stephen's efficiency—boy as he was—was evidently held by the plain-spoken underlings of the verdurer; and this added to Mistress Birkenholt's dislike to the presence of her husband's half-brothers, whom she regarded as interlopers without a right to exist. Matters were brought to a climax by old Spring's resentment at being roughly teased by her spoilt children. He had done nothing worse than growl and show his teeth, but the town-bred dame had taken alarm, and half in terror, half in spite, had insisted on his instant execution, since he was too old to be valuable. Stephen, who loved the dog only less

than he loved his brother Ambrose, had come to high words with her; and the end of the altercation had been that she had declared that she would suffer no great lubbers of the half-blood to devour her children's inheritance, and teach them ill manners, and that go they must, and that instantly. John had muttered a little about "not so fast, dame," and "for very shame," but she had turned on him, and rated him with a violence that demonstrated who was ruler in the house, and took away all disposition to tarry long under the new dynasty.

The boys possessed two uncles, one on each side of the house. Their father's elder brother had been a man-at-arms, having preferred a stirring life to the Forest, and had fought in the last surges of the Wars of the Roses. Having become disabled and infirm, he had taken advantage of a corrody, or right of maintenance, as being of kin to a benefactor of Hyde Abbey at Winchester, to which Birkenholt some generations back had presented a few roods of land, in right of which, one descendant at a time might be maintained in the Abbey. Intelligence of his brother's death had been sent to Richard Birkenholt, but answer had been

returned that he was too evil-disposed with the gout to attend the burial.

The other uncle, Harry Randall, had disappeared from the country under a cloud connected with the king's deer, leaving behind him the reputation of a careless, thriftless, jovial fellow, the best company in all the Forest, and capable of doing every one's work save his own.

The two brothers, who were about seven and six years old at the time of his flight, had a lively recollection of his charms as a playmate, and of their mother's grief for him, and refusal to believe any ill of her Hal. Rumours had come of his attainment to vague and unknown greatness at court, under the patronage of the Lord Archbishop of York, which the Verdurer laughed to scorn, though his wife gave credit to them. Gifts had come from time to time, passed through a succession of servants and officials of the king, such as a coral and silver rosary, a jewelled bodkin, an agate carved with St. Catherine, an ivory pouncet box with a pierced gold coin as the lid; but no letter with them, as indeed Hal Randall had never been induced to learn to read or write. Master Birkenholt looked doubtfully at the tokens and hoped Hal had come honestly by them;

but his wife had thoroughly imbued her sons with the belief that Uncle Hal was shining in his proper sphere, where he was better appreciated than at home. Thus their one plan was to go to London to find Uncle Hal, who was sure to put Stephen on the road to fortune, and enable Ambrose to become a great scholar, his favourite ambition.

His gifts would, as Ambrose observed, serve them as tokens, and with the purpose of claiming them, they re-entered the hall, a long low room, with a handsome open roof, and walls tapestried with dressed skins, interspersed with antlers, hung with weapons of the chase. At one end of the hall was a small polished barrel, always replenished with beer, at the other a hearth with a wood fire constantly burning, and there was a table running the whole length of the room; at one end of this was laid a cloth, with a few trenchers on it, and horn cups, surrounding a barley loaf and a cheese, this meagre irregular supper being considered as a sufficient supplement to the funeral baked meats which had abounded at Beaulieu. John Birkenholt sat at the table with a trencher and horn before him, uneasily using his knife to crumble, rather than cut, his bread.

His wife, a thin, pale, shrewish-looking woman, was warming her child's feet at the fire, before putting him to bed, and an old woman sat spinning and nodding on a settle at a little distance.

"Brother," said Stephen, "we have thought on what you said. We will put our stuff together, and if you will count us out our portions, we will be afoot by sunrise to-morrow."

"Nay, nay, lad, I said not there was such haste; did I, mistress housewife?"—(she snorted); "only that thou art a well-grown lusty fellow, and 'tis time thou wentest forth. For thee, Ambrose, thou wottest I made thee a fair offer of bed and board."

"That is," called out the wife, "if thou wilt make a fair scholar of little Will. 'Tis a mighty good offer. There are not many who would let their child be taught by a mere stripling like thee!"

"Nay," said Ambrose, who could not bring himself to thank her, "I go with Stephen, mistress; I would mend my scholarship ere I teach."

"As you please," said Mistress Maud, shrugging her shoulders, "only never say that a fair offer was not made to you."

"And," said Stephen, "so please you, brother John, hand us over our portions, and the jewels as bequeathed to us, and we will be gone."

"Portions, quotha?" returned John. "Boy, they be not due to you till you be come to years of discretion."

The brothers looked at one another, and Stephen said, "Nay, now, brother, I know not how that may be, but I do know that you cannot drive us from our father's house without maintenance, and detain what belongs to us."

And Ambrose muttered something about "my Lord of Beaulieu."

"Look you, now," said John, "did I ever speak of driving you from home without maintenance? Hath not Ambrose had his choice of staying here, and Stephen of waiting till some office be found for him? As for putting forty crowns into the hands of striplings like you, it were mere throwing it to the robbers."

"That being so," said Ambrose turning to Stephen, "we will to Beaulieu, and see what counsel my lord will give us."

"Yea, do, like the vipers ye are, and embroil us with my Lord of Beaulieu," cried Maud from the fire.

"See," said John, in his more caressing fashion, "it is not well to carry family tales to strangers, and—and—"

He was disconcerted by a laugh from the old nurse, "Ho! John Birkenholt, thou wast ever a lad of smooth tongue, but an thou, or madam here, think that thy brothers can be put forth from thy father's door without their due before the good man be cold in his grave, and the Forest not ring with it, thou art mightily out in thy reckoning!"

"Peace, thou old hag; what matter is't of thine?" began Mistress Maud, but again came the harsh laugh.

"Matter of mine! Why, whose matter should it be but mine, that have nursed all three of the lads, ay, and their father before them, besides four more that lie in the graveyard at Beaulieu? Rest their sweet souls! And I tell thee, Master John, an thou do not righteously by these thy brothers, thou mayst back to thy parchments at Southampton, for not a man or beast in the Forest will give thee good day."

They all felt the old woman's authority. She was able and spirited in her homely way, and more mistress of the house than Mrs. Birkenholt herself; and such

were the terms of domestic service, that there was no peril of losing her place. Even Maud knew that to turn her out was an impossibility, and that she must be accepted like the loneliness, damp, and other evils of Forest life. John had been under her dominion, and proceeded to persuade her. "Good now, Nurse Joan, what have I denied these rash striplings that my father would have granted them? Wouldst thou have them carry all their portion in their hands, to be cozened of it at the first ale-house, or robbed on the next heath?"

"I would have thee do a brother's honest part, John Birkenholt. A loving part I say not. Thou wert always like a very popple for hardness, and smoothness, ay, and slipperiness. Heigh ho! But what is right by the lads, thou *shalt* do."

John cowered under her eye as he had done at six years old, and faltered, "I only seek to do them right, nurse."

Nurse Joan uttered an emphatic grunt, but Mistress Maud broke in, "They are not to hang about here in idleness, eating my poor child's substance, and teaching him ill manners."

"We would not stay here if you paid us for it," returned Stephen.

"And whither would you go?" asked John.

"To Winchester first, to seek counsel with our uncle Birkenholt. Then to London, where uncle Randall will help us to our fortunes."

"Gipsy Hal! He is more like to help you to a halter," sneered John, *sotto voce*, and Joan herself observed, "Their uncle at Winchester will show them better than to run after that there go-by-chance."

However, as no one wished to keep the youths, and they were equally determined to go, an accommodation was come to at last. John was induced to give them three crowns apiece and to yield them up the five small trinkets specified, though not without some murmurs from his wife. It was no doubt safer to leave the rest of the money in his hands than to carry it with them, and he undertook that it should be forthcoming, if needed for any fit purpose, such as the purchase of an office, an apprentice's fee, or an outfit as a squire. It was a vague promise that cost him nothing just then, and thus could be readily made, and John's great desire was to get them away so that he could aver that they had gone by their own free will, without any hardship, for he had seen enough at his father's obsequies to show

him that the love and sympathy of all the scanty dwellers in the Forest was with them.

Nurse Joan had fought their battles, but with the sore heart of one who was parting with her darlings never to see them again. She bade them doff their suits of mourning that she might make up their fardels, as they would travel in their Lincoln-green suits. To take these she repaired to the little rough shed-like chamber where the two brothers lay for the last time on their pallet bed, awake, and watching for her, with Spring at their feet. The poor old woman stood over them, as over the motherless nurslings whom she had tended, and she should probably never see more, but she was a woman of shrewd sense, and perceived that "with the new madam in the hall" it was better that they should be gone before worse ensued.

She advised leaving their valuables sealed up in the hands of my Lord Abbot, but they were averse to this —for they said their uncle Randall, who had not seen them since they were little children, would not know them without some pledge.

She shook her head. "The less you deal with Hal Randall the better," she said. "Come now, lads, be

advised and go no farther than Winchester, where Master Ambrose may get all the book-learning he is ever craving for, and you, Master Steevie, may prentice yourself to some good trade."

"Prentice!" cried Stephen, scornfully.

"Ay, ay. As good blood as thine has been prenticed," returned Joan. "Better so than be a cut-throat sword-and-buckler fellow, ever slaying some one else or getting thyself slain—a terror to all peaceful folk. But thine uncle will see to that—a steady-minded lad always was he—was Master Dick."

Consoling herself with this hope, the old woman rolled up their new suits with some linen into two neat knapsacks; sighing over the thought that unaccustomed fingers would deal with the shirts she had spun, bleached, and sewn. But she had confidence in "Master Dick," and concluded that to send his nephews to him at Winchester gave a far better chance of their being cared for, than letting them be flouted into ill-doing by their grudging brother and his wife.

CHAPTER II.

THE GRANGE OF SILKSTEDE.

"All Itchen's valley lay,
St. Catherine's breezy side and the woodlands far away,
The huge Cathedral sleeping in venerable gloom,
The modest College tower, and the bedesmen's Norman home."

LORD SELBORNE.

VERY early in the morning, even according to the habits of the time, were Stephen and Ambrose Birkenholt astir. They were full of ardour to enter on the new and unknown world beyond the Forest, and much as they loved it, any change that kept them still to their altered life would have been distasteful.

Nurse Joan, asking no questions, folded up their fardels on their backs, and packed the wallets for their day's journey with ample provision. She charged them to be good lads, to say their Pater, Credo, and Ave daily, and never omit Mass on a Sunday. They kissed

her like their mother and promised heartily—and Stephen took his crossbow. They had had some hope of setting forth so early as to avoid all other *human* farewells, except that Ambrose wished to begin by going to Beaulieu to take leave of the Father who had been his kind master, and get his blessing and counsel. But Beaulieu was three miles out of their way, and Stephen had not the same desire, being less attached to his schoolmaster and more afraid of hindrances being thrown in their way.

Moreover, contrary to their expectation, their elder brother came forth, and declared his intention of setting them forth on their way, bestowing a great amount of good advice, to the same purport as that of nurse Joan, namely, that they should let their uncle Richard Birkenholt find them some employment at Winchester, where they, or at least Ambrose, might even obtain admission into the famous college of St. Mary.

In fact, this excellent elder brother persuaded himself that it would be doing them an absolute wrong to keep such promising youths hidden in the Forest.

The purpose of his going thus far with them made itself evident. It was to see them past the turning to

Beaulieu. No doubt he wished to tell the story in his own way, and that they should not present themselves there as orphans expelled from their father's house. It would sound much better that he had sent them to ask counsel of their uncle at Winchester, the fit person to take charge of them. And as he represented that to go to Beaulieu would lengthen their day's journey so much that they might hardly reach Winchester that night, while all Stephen's wishes were to go forward, Ambrose could only send his greetings. There was another debate over Spring, who had followed his master as usual. John uttered an exclamation of vexation at perceiving it, and bade Stephen drive the dog back. "Or give me the leash to drag him. He will never follow me."

"He goes with us," said Stephen.

"He! Thou'lt never have the folly! The old hound is half blind and past use. No man will take thee in with him after thee."

"Then they shall not take me in," said Stephen. "I'll not leave him to be hanged by thee."

"Who spoke of hanging him!"

"Thy wife will soon, if she hath not already."

"Thou wilt be for hanging him thyself ere thou have made a day's journey with him on the king's highway, which is not like these forest paths, I would have thee to know. Why, he limps already."

"Then I'll carry him," said Stephen, doggedly.

"What hast thou to say to that device, Ambrose?" asked John, appealing to the elder and wiser.

But Ambrose only answered "I'll help," and as John had no particular desire to retain the superannuated hound, and preferred on the whole to be spared sentencing him, no more was said on the subject as they went along, until all John's stock of good counsel had been lavished on his brothers' impatient ears. He bade them farewell, and turned back to the lodge, and they struck away along the woodland pathway which they had been told led to Winchester, though they had never been thither, nor seen any town save Southampton and Romsey at long intervals. On they went, sometimes through beech and oak woods of noble, almost primeval, trees, but more often across tracts of holly underwood, illuminated here and there with the snowy garlands of the wild cherry, and beneath with wide spaces covered with young green bracken, whose soft

irregular masses on the undulating ground had somewhat the effect of the waves of the sea. These alternated with stretches of yellow gorse and brown heather, sheets of cotton-grass, and pools of white crowfoot, and all the vegetation of a mountain side, only that the mountain was not there.

The brothers looked with eyes untaught to care for beauty, but with a certain love of the home scenes, tempered by youth's impatience for something new. The nightingales sang, the thrushes flew out before them, the wild duck and moorhen glanced on the pools. Here and there they came on the furrows left by the snout of the wild swine, and in the open tracts rose the graceful heads of the deer, but of inhabitants or travellers they scarce saw any, save when they halted at the little hamlet of Minestead, where a small alehouse was kept by one Will Purkiss, who claimed descent from the charcoal-burner who had carried William Rufus's corpse to burial at Winchester—the one fact in history known to all New Foresters, though perhaps Ambrose and John were the only persons beyond the walls of Beaulieu who did not suppose the affair to have taken place in the last generation.

A draught of ale and a short rest were welcome as the heat of the day came on, making the old dog plod wearily on with his tongue out, so that Stephen began to consider whether he should indeed have to be his bearer—a serious matter, for the creature at full length measured nearly as much as he did. They met hardly any one, and they and Spring were alike too well known and trained, for difficulties to arise as to leading a dog through the Forest. Should they ever come to the term of the Forest? It was not easy to tell when they were really beyond it, for the ground was much of the same kind. Only the smooth, treeless hills, where they had always been told Winchester lay, seemed more defined, and they saw no more deer, but here and there were inclosures where wheat and barley were growing, and black timbered farm-houses began to show themselves at intervals. Herd boys, as rough and unkempt as their charges, could be seen looking after little tawny cows, black-faced sheep, or spotted pigs, with curs which barked fiercely at poor weary Spring, even as their masters were more disposed to throw stones than to answer questions.

By and by, on the further side of a green valley,

could be seen buildings with an encircling wall of flint and mortar faced with ruddy brick, the dark red-tiled roofs rising among walnut-trees, and an orchard in full bloom spreading into a long green field.

"Winchester must be nigh. The sun is getting low," said Stephen.

"We will ask. The good folk will at least give us an answer," said Ambrose wearily.

As they reached the gate, a team of plough horses was passing in led by a peasant lad, while a lay brother, with his gown tucked up, rode sideways on one, whistling. An Augustinian monk, ruddy, burly, and sunburnt, stood in the farm-yard, to receive an account of the day's work, and doffing his cap, Ambrose asked whether Winchester were near.

"Three mile or thereaway, my good lad," said the monk; "thou'lt see the towers an ye mount the hill. Whence art thou?" he added, looking at the two young strangers. "Scholars? The College elects not yet a while."

"We be from the Forest, so please your reverence, and are bound for Hyde Abbey, where our uncle, Master Richard Birkenholt, dwells."

"And oh, sir," added Stephen, "may we crave a drop of water for our dog?"

The monk smiled as he looked at Spring, who had flung himself down to take advantage of the halt, hanging out his tongue, and panting spasmodically. "A noble beast," he said, "of the Windsor breed, is't not?" Then laying his hand on the graceful head, "Poor old hound, thou art o'er travelled. He is aged for such a journey, if you came from the Forest since morn. Twelve years at the least, I should say, by his muzzle."

"Your reverence is right," said Stephen, "he is twelve years old. He is two years younger than I am, and my ather gave him to me when he was a little whelp."

"So thou must needs take him to seek thy fortune with thee," said the good-natured Augustinian, not knowing how truly he spoke. "Come in, my lads, here's a drink for him. What said you was your uncle's name?" and as Ambrose repeated it, "Birkenholt! Living on a corrody at Hyde! Ay! ay! My lads, I have a call to Winchester to-morrow, you'd best tarry the night here at Silkstede Grange, and fare forward with me."

The tired boys were heartily glad to accept the

invitation, more especially as Spring, happy as he was with the trough of water before him, seemed almost too tired to stand over it, and after the first, tried to lap lying down. Silkstede was not a regular convent, only a grange or farm-house, presided over by one of the monks, with three or four lay brethren under him, and a little colony of hinds, in the surrounding cottages, to cultivate the farm, and tend a few cattle and numerous sheep, the special care of the Augustinians.

Father Shoveller, as the good-natured monk who had received the travellers was called, took them into the spacious but homely chamber which served as refectory, kitchen, and hall. He called to the lay brother who was busy over the open hearth to fry a few more rashers of bacon; and after they had washed away the dust of their journey at the trough where Spring had slaked his thirst, they sat down with him to a hearty supper, which smacked more of the grange than of the monastery, spread on a large solid oak table, and washed down with good ale. The repast was shared by the lay brethren and farm servants, and also by two or three big sheep dogs, who had to be taught their manners towards Spring.

There was none of the formality that Ambrose was accustomed to at Beaulieu in the great refectory, where no one spoke, but one of the brethren read aloud some theological book from a stone pulpit in the wall. Here Brother Shoveller conversed without stint, chiefly with the brother who seemed to be a kind of bailiff, with whom he discussed the sheep that were to be taken into market the next day, and the prices to be given for them by either the college, the castle, or the butchers of Boucher Row. He however found time to talk to the two guests, and being sprung from a family in the immediate neighbourhood, he knew the verdurer's name, and ere he was a monk, had joined in the chase in the Forest.

There was a little oratory attached to the hall, where he and the lay brethren kept the hours, to a certain degree, putting two or three services into one, on a liberal interpretation of *laborare est orare*. Ambrose's responses made their host observe as they went out, "Thou hast thy Latin pat, my son, there's the making of a scholar in thee."

Then they took their first night's rest away from home, in a small guest-chamber, with a good bed, though

bare in all other respects. Brother Shoveller likewise had a cell to himself, but the lay brethren slept promiscuously among their sheep-dogs on the floor of the refectory.

All were afoot in the early morning, and Stephen and Ambrose were awakened by the tumultuous bleatings of the flock of sheep that were being driven from their fold to meet their fate at Winchester market. They heard Brother Shoveller shouting his orders to the shepherds in tones a great deal more like those of a farmer than of a monk, and they made haste to dress themselves and join him as he was muttering a morning abbreviation of his obligatory devotions in the oratory, observing that they might be in time to hear mass at one of the city churches, but the sheep might delay them, and they had best break their fast ere starting.

It was Wednesday, a day usually kept as a moderate fast, so the breakfast was of oatmeal porridge, flavoured with honey, and washed down with mead, after which Brother Shoveller mounted his mule, a sleek creature, whose long ears had an air of great contentment, and rode off, accommodating his pace to that of his young companions up a stony cart-track which soon led them

to the top of a chalk down, whence, as in a map, they could see Winchester, surrounded by its walls, lying in a hollow between the smooth green hills. At one end rose the castle, its fortifications covering its own hill, beneath, in the valley, the long, low massive Cathedral, the college buildings and tower with its pinnacles, and nearer at hand, among the trees, the Almshouse of Noble Poverty at St. Cross, beneath the round hill of St. Catherine. Churches and monastic buildings stood thickly in the town, and indeed, Brother Shoveller said, shaking his head, that there were well-nigh as many churches as folk to go to them; the place was decayed since the time he remembered when Prince Arthur was born there. Hyde Abbey he could not show them, from where they stood, as it lay further off by the river side, having been removed from the neighbourhood of the Minster, because the brethren of St. Grimbald could not agree with those of St. Swithun's belonging to the Minster, as indeed their buildings were so close together that it was hardly possible to pass between them, and their bells jangled in each other's ears.

Brother Shoveller did not seem to entertain a very

high opinion of the monks of St. Grimbald, and he asked the boys whether they were expected there. "No," they said; "tidings of their father's death had been sent by one of the woodmen, and the only answer that had been returned was that Master Richard Birkenholt was ill at ease, but would have masses said for his brother's soul."

"Hem!" said the Augustinian ominously; but at that moment they came up with the sheep, and his attention was wholly absorbed by them, as he joined the lay brothers in directing the shepherds who were driving them across the downs, steering them over the high ground towards the arched West Gate close to the royal castle. The street sloped rapidly down, and Brother Shoveller conducted his young companions between the overhanging houses, with stalls between serving as shops, till they reached the open space round the Market Cross, on the steps of which women sat with baskets of eggs, butter, and poultry, raised above the motley throng of cattle and sheep, with their dogs and drivers, the various cries of man and beast forming an incongruous accompaniment to the bells of the churches that surrounded the market-place.

Citizens' wives in hood and wimple were there, shrilly bargaining for provision for their households, squires and grooms in quest of hay for their masters' stables, purveyors seeking food for the garrison, lay brethren and sisters for their convents, and withal, the usual margin of begging friars, wandering gleemen, jugglers and pedlars, though in no great numbers, as this was only a Wednesday market-day, not a fair. Ambrose recognised one or two who made part of the crowd at Beaulieu only two days previously, when he had "seen through tears the juggler leap," and the jingling tune one of them was playing on a rebeck brought back associations of almost unbearable pain. Happily, Father Shoveller, having seen his sheep safely bestowed in a pen, bethought him of bidding the lay brother in attendance show the young gentlemen the way to Hyde Abbey, and turning up a street at right angles to the principal one, they were soon out of the throng.

It was a lonely place, with a decayed uninhabited appearance, and Brother Peter told them it had been the Jewry, whence good King Edward had banished all the unbelieving dogs of Jews, and where no one chose to dwell after them.

Soon they came in sight of a large extent of monastic buildings, partly of stone, but the more domestic offices of flint and brick or mortar. Large meadows stretched away to the banks of the Itchen, with cattle grazing in them, but in one was a set of figures to whom the lay brother pointed with a laugh of exulting censure.

"Long bows!" exclaimed Stephen. "Who be they?"

"Brethren of St. Grimbald, sir. Such rule doth my Lord of Hyde keep, mitred abbot though he be. They say the good bishop hath called him to order, but what recks he of bishops? Good-day, Brother Bulpett, here be two young kinsmen of Master Birkenholt to visit him, and so *benedicite*, fair sirs. St. Austin's grace be with you!"

Through a gate between two little red octagonal towers, Brother Bulpett led the two visitors, and called to another of the monks, "*Benedicite*, Father Segrim, here be two striplings wanting speech of old Birkenholt."

"Looking after dead men's shoes, I trow," muttered Father Segrim, with a sour look at the lads, as he led

them through the outer court, where some fine horses were being groomed, and then across a second court surrounded with a beautiful cloister, with flower beds in front of it. Here, on a stone bench, in the sun, clad in a gown furred with rabbit skin, sat a decrepit old man, both his hands clasped over his staff. Into his deaf ears their guide shouted, "These boys say they are your kindred, Master Birkenholt."

"Anan?" said the old man, trembling with palsy. The lads knew him to be older than their father, but they were taken by surprise at such feebleness, and the monk did not aid them, only saying roughly, "There he is. Tell your errand."

"How fares it with you, uncle?" ventured Ambrose.

"Who be ye? I know none of you," muttered the old man, shaking his head still more.

"We are Ambrose and Stephen from the Forest," shouted Ambrose.

"Ah! Steve! poor Stevie! The accursed boar has rent his goodly face so as I would never have known him. Poor Steve! Rest his soul!"

The old man began to weep, while his nephews recollected that they had heard that another uncle had been

slain by the tusk of a wild boar in early manhood. Then to their surprise, his eyes fell on Spring, and calling the hound by name, he caressed the creature's head—"Spring, poor Spring! Stevie's faithful old dog. Hast lost thy master? Wilt follow me now?"

He was thinking of a Spring as well as of a Stevie of sixty years ago, and he babbled on of how many fawns were in the Queen's Bower this summer, and who had best shot at the butts at Lyndhurst, as if he were excited by the breath of his native Forest, but there was no making him understand that he was speaking with his nephews. The name of his brother John only set him repeating that John loved the greenwood, and would be content to take poor Stevie's place and dwell in the verdurer's lodge; but that he himself ought to be abroad, he had seen brave Lord Talbot's ships ready at Southampton, John might stay at home, but he would win fame and honour in Gascony.

And while he thus wandered, and the boys stood by perplexed and distressed, Brother Segrim came back, and said, "So, young sirs, have you seen enough of your doting kinsman? The sub-prior bids me say that we harbour no strange, idling, lubber lads nor strange

dogs here. 'Tis enough for us to be saddled with dissolute old men-at-arms without all their idle kin making an excuse to come and pay their devoirs. These corrodies are a heavy charge and a weighty abuse, and if there be the visitation the king's majesty speaks of, they will be one of the first matters to be amended."

Wherewith Stephen and Ambrose found themselves walked out of the cloister of St. Grimbald, and the gates shut behind them.

CHAPTER III.

KINSMEN AND STRANGERS.

"The reul of St. Maure and of St. Beneit
Because that it was old and some deale streit
This ilke monk let old things pace;
He held ever of the new world the trace."

CHAUCER.

"THE churls!" exclaimed Stephen.

"Poor old man!" said Ambrose; "I hope they are good to him!"

"To think that thus ends all that once was gallant talk of fighting under Talbot's banner," sighed Stephen, thoughtful for a moment. "However, there's a good deal to come first."

"Yea, and what next?" said the elder brother.

"On to uncle Hal. I ever looked most to him. He will purvey me to a page's place in some noble household, and get thee a clerk's or scholar's place in my

Lord of York's house. Mayhap there will be room for us both there, for my Lord of York hath a goodly following of armed men."

"Which way lies the road to London?"

"We must back into the town and ask, as well as fill our stomachs and our wallets," said Ambrose. "Talk of their rule! The entertaining of strangers is better understood at Silkstede than at Hyde."

"Tush! A grudged crust sticks in the gullet," returned Stephen. "Come on, Ambrose, I marked the sign of the White Hart by the market-place. There will be a welcome there for foresters."

They returned on their steps past the dilapidated buildings of the old Jewry, and presently saw the market in full activity; but the sounds and sights of busy life where they were utter strangers, gave Ambrose a sense of loneliness and desertion, and his heart sank as the bolder Stephen threaded the way in the direction of a broad entry over which stood a slender-bodied hart with gold hoofs, horns, collar, and chain.

"How now, my sons?" said a full cheery voice, and to their joy, they found themselves pushed up against Father Shoveller.

"Returned already! Did you get scant welcome at Hyde? Here, come where we can get a free breath, and tell me."

They passed through the open gateway of the White Hart, into the court, but before listening to them, the monk exchanged greetings with the hostess, who stood at the door in a broad hat and velvet bodice, and demanded what cheer there was for noon-meat.

"A jack, reverend sir, eels and a grampus fresh sent up from Hampton; also fresh-killed mutton for such lay folk as are not curious of the Wednesday fast. They are laying the board even now."

"Lay platters for me and these two young gentlemen," said the Augustinian. "Ye be my guests, ye wot," he added, "since ye tarried not for meat at Hyde."

"Nor did they ask us," exclaimed Stephen; "lubbers and idlers were the best words they had for us."

"Ho! ho! That's the way with the brethren of St. Grimbald! And your uncle?"

"Alas, sir, he doteth with age," said Ambrose. "He took Stephen for his own brother, dead under King Harry of Windsor."

"So! I had heard somewhat of his age and sickness. Who was it who thrust you out?"

"A lean brother with a thin red beard, and a shrewd puckered visage."

"Ha! By that token 'twas Segrim the bursar. He wots how to drive a bargain. St. Austin! but he deemed you came to look after your kinsman's corrody."

"He said the king spake of a visitation to abolish corrodies from religious houses," said Ambrose.

"He'll abolish the long bow from them first," said Father Shoveller. "Ay, and miniver from my Lord Abbot's hood. "I'd admonish you, my good brethren of St. Grimbald, to be in no hurry for a visitation which might scarce stop where you would fain have it. Well, my sons, are ye bound for the Forest again? An ye be, we'll wend back together, and ye can lie at Silkstede to-night."

"Alack, kind father, there's no more home for us in the Forest," said Ambrose.

"Methought ye had a brother?"

"Yea; but our brother hath a wife."

"Ho! ho! And the wife will none of you?"

"She would have kept Ambrose to teach her boy his primer," said Stephen; "but she would none of Spring nor of me."

"We hoped to receive counsel from our uncle at Hyde," added Ambrose.

"Have ye no purpose now?" inquired the Father, his jolly good-humoured face showing much concern.

"Yea," manfully returned Stephen. "'Twas what I ever hoped to do, to fare on and seek our fortune in London."

"Ha! To pick up gold and silver like Dick Whittington. Poor old Spring here will scarce do you the part of his cat," and the monk's hearty laugh angered Stephen into muttering, "We are no fools," but Father Shoveller only laughed the more, saying, "Fair and softly, my son, ye'll never pick up the gold if ye cannot brook a kindly quip. Have you friends or kindred in London?"

"Yea, that have we, sir," cried Stephen; "our mother's own brother, Master Randall, hath come to preferment there in my Lord Archbishop of York's household, and hath sent us tokens from time to time, which we will show you."

"Not while we be feasting," said Father Shoveller, hastily checking Ambrose, who was feeling in his bosom. "See, the knaves be bringing their grampus across the court. Here, we'll clean our hands, and be ready for the meal;" and he showed them, under a projecting gallery in the inn yard a stone trough, through which flowed a stream of water, in which he proceeded to wash his hands and face, and to wipe them in a coarse towel suspended nigh at hand. Certainly after handling sheep freely there was need, though such ablutions were a refinement not indulged in by all the company who assembled round the well-spread board of the White Hart for the meal after the market. They were a motley company. By the host's side sat a knight on his way home from pilgrimage to Compostella, or perhaps a mission to Spain, with a couple of squires and other attendants, and converse of political import seemed to be passing between him and a shrewd-looking man in a lawyer's hood and gown, the recorder of Winchester, who preferred being a daily guest at the White Hart to keeping a table of his own. Country franklins and yeomen, merchants and men-at-arms, palmers and craftsmen, friars and

monks, black, white, and grey, and with almost all, Father Shoveller had greeting or converse to exchange. He knew everybody, and had friendly talk with all, on canons or crops, on war or wool, on the prices of pigs or prisoners, on the news of the country side, or on the perilous innovations in learning at Oxford, which might, it was feared, even affect St. Mary's College at Winchester.

He did not affect outlandish fishes himself, and dined upon pike, but observing the curiosity of his guests, he took good care to have them well supplied with grampus; also in due time with varieties of the pudding and cake kind which had never dawned on their forest-bred imagination, and with a due proportion of good ale—the same over which the knight might be heard rejoicing, and lauding far above the Spanish or French wines, on which he said he had been half starved.

Father Shoveller mused a good deal over his pike and its savoury stuffing. He was not by any means an ideal monk, but he was equally far from being a scandal. He was the shrewd man of business and manager of his fraternity, conducting the farming operations and

making all the bargains, following his rule respectably according to the ordinary standard of his time, but not rising to any spirituality, and while duly observing the fast day, as to the quality of his food, eating with the appetite of a man who lived in the open fields.

But when their hunger was appeased, with many a fragment given to Spring, the young Birkenholts, wearied of the endless talk that was exchanged over the tankard, began to grow restless, and after exchanging signs across Father Shoveller's solid person, they simultaneously rose, and began to thank him and say they must pursue their journey.

"How now, not so fast, my sons," said the Father; "tarry a bit, I have more to say to thee. Prayers and provender, thou knowst—I'll come anon. So, sir, didst say yonder beggarly Flemings haggle at thy price for thy Southdown fleeces. Weight of dirt forsooth! Do not we wash the sheep in the Poolhole stream, the purest water in the shire?"

Manners withheld Ambrose from responding to Stephen's hot impatience, while the merchant in the sleek puce-coloured coat discussed the Flemish wool market with the monk for a good half-hour longer.

By this time the knight's horses were brought into the yard, and the merchant's men had made ready his palfrey, his pack-horse being already on the way; the host's son came round with the reckoning, and there was a general move. Stephen expected to escape, and hardly could brook the good-natured authority with which Father Shoveller put Ambrose aside, when he would have discharged their share of the reckoning, and took it upon himself. "Said I not ye were my guests?" quoth he. "We missed our morning mass, it will do us no harm to hear Nones in the Minster."

"Sir, we thank you, but we should be on our way," said Ambrose, incited by Stephen's impatient gestures.

"Tut, tut. Fair and softly, my son, or more haste may be worse speed. Methought ye had somewhat to show me."

Stephen's youthful independence might chafe, but the habit of submission to authorities made him obediently follow the monk out at the back entrance of the inn, behind which lay the Minster yard, the grand western front rising in front of them, and the buildings of St. Swithun's Abbey extending far to their

right. The hour was nearly noon, and the space was deserted, except for an old woman sitting at the great western doorway with a basket of rosaries made of nuts and of snail shells, and a workman or two employed on the bishop's new reredos.

"Now for thy tokens," said Father Shoveller. "See my young foresters, ye be new to the world. Take an old man's counsel, and never show, nor speak of such gear in an hostel. Mine host of the White Hart is an old gossip of mine, and indifferent honest, but who shall say who might be within earshot?"

Stephen had a mind to say that he did not see why the meddling monk should wish to see them at all, and Ambrose looked a little reluctant, but Father Shoveller said in his good-humoured way, "As you please, young sirs. 'Tis but an old man's wish to see whether he can do aught to help you, that you be not as lambs among wolves. Mayhap ye deem ye can walk into London town, and that the first man you meet can point you to your uncle—Randall call ye him?—as readily as I could show you my brother, Thomas Shoveller of Cranbury. But you are just as like to meet with some knave who might cozen you of all you have, or mayhap

a beadle might take you up for vagabonds, and thrust you in the stocks, or ever you get to London town, so I would fain give you some commendation, an I knew to whom to make it, and ye be not too proud to take it."

"You are but too good to us, sir," said Ambrose quite conquered, though Stephen only half believed in the difficulties. The Father took them within the west door of the Minster, and looking up and down the long arcade of the southern aisle to see that no one was watching, he inspected the tokens, and cross-examined them on their knowledge of their uncle.

His latest gift, the rosary, had come by the hand of Friar Hurst, a begging Minorite of Southampton, who had it from another of his order at Winchester, who had received it from one of the king's archers at the Castle, with a message to Mistress Birkenholt that it came from her brother, Master Randall, who had good preferment in London, in the house of my Lord Archbishop of York, without whose counsel King Henry never stirred. As to the coming of the agate and the pouncet box, the minds of the boys were very hazy. They knew that the pouncet box had been conveyed

through the attendants of the Abbot of Beaulieu, but they were only sure that from that time the belief had prevailed with their mother that her brother was prospering in the house of the all-powerful Wolsey. The good Augustinian, examining the tokens, thought they gave colour to that opinion. The rosary and agate might have been picked up in an ecclesiastical household, and the lid of the pouncet box was made of a Spanish coin, likely to have come through some of the attendants of Queen Katharine.

"It hath an appearance," he said. "I marvel whether there be still at the Castle this archer who hath had speech with Master Randall, for if ye know no more than ye do at present, 'tis seeking a needle in a bottle of hay. But see, here come the brethren that be to sing Nones—sinner that I am, to have said no Hours since the morn, being letted with lawful business."

Again the unwilling Stephen had to submit. There was no feeling for the incongruous in those days, and reverence took very different directions from those in which it now shows itself, so that nobody had any objection to Spring's pacing gravely with the others

towards the Lady Chapel, where the Hours were sung, since the Choir was in the hands of workmen, and the sound of chipping stone could be heard from it, where Bishop Fox's elaborate lace-work reredos was in course of erection. Passing the shrine of St. Swithun, and the grand tomb of Cardinal Beaufort, where his life-coloured effigy filled the boys with wonder, they followed their leader's example, and knelt within the Lady Chapel, while the brief Latin service for the ninth hour was sung through by the canon, clerks, and boys. It really was the Sixth, but cumulative easy-going treatment of the Breviary had made this the usual time for it, as the name of noon still testifies. The boys' attention, it must be confessed, was chiefly expended on the wonderful miracles of the Blessed Virgin in fresco on the walls of the chapel, all tending to prove that here was hope for those who said their Ave in any extremity of fire or flood.

Nones ended, Father Shoveller, with many a halt for greeting or for gossip, took the lads up the hill towards the wide fortified space where the old Castle and royal Hall of Henry of Winchester looked down on the city, and after some friendly passages with the warder at the

gate, Father Shoveller explained that he was in quest of some one recently come from court, of whom the striplings in his company could make inquiry concerning a kinsman in the household of my Lord Archbishop of York. The warder scratched his head, and bethinking himself that Eastcheap Jockey was the reverend father's man, summoned a horse-boy to call that worthy.

"Where was he?"

"Sitting over his pottle in the Hall," was the reply, and the monk, with a laugh savouring little of asceticism, said he would seek him there, and accordingly crossed the court to the noble Hall, with its lofty dark marble columns, and the Round Table of King Arthur suspended at the upper end. The governor of the Castle had risen from his meal long ago, but the garrison in the piping times of peace would make their ration of ale last as far into the afternoon as their commanders would suffer. And half a dozen men still sat there, one or two snoring, two playing at dice on a clear corner of the board, and another, a smart well-dressed fellow in a bright scarlet jerkin, laying down the law to a country bumpkin, who looked somewhat dazed. The first of these was, as it appeared, Eastcheap Jockey,

and there was something both of the readiness and the impudence of the Londoner in his manner, when he turned to answer the question. He knew many in my Lord of York's house—as many as a man was like to know where there was a matter of two hundred folk between clerks and soldiers, he had often crushed a pottle with them. No; he had never heard of one called Randall, neither in hat nor cowl, but he knew more of them by face than by name, and more by byname than surname or christened name. He was certainly not the archer who had brought a token for Mistress Birkenholt, and his comrades all avouched equal ignorance on the subject. Nothing could be gained there, and while Father Shoveller rubbed his bald head in consideration, Stephen rose to take leave.

"Look you here, my fair son," said the monk. "Starting at this hour, though the days be long, you will not reach any safe halting place with daylight, whereas by lying a night in this good city, you might reach Alton to-morrow, and there is a home where the name of Brother Shoveller will win you free lodging and entertainment."

"And to-night, good Father?" inquired Ambrose.

"That will I see to, if ye will follow me."

Stephen was devoured with impatience during the farewells in the Castle, but Ambrose represented that the good man was giving them much of his time, and that it would be unseemly and ungrateful to break from him.

"What matter is it of his? And why should he make us lose a whole day?" grumbled Stephen.

"What special gain would a day be to us?" sighed Ambrose. "I am thankful that any should take heed for us."

"Ay, you love leading-strings," returned Stephen. "Where is he going now? All out of our way!"

Father Shoveller, however, as he went down the Castle hill, explained that the Warden of St. Elizabeth's Hospital was his friend, and knowing him to have acquaintance among the clergy of St. Paul's, it would be well to obtain a letter of commendation from him, which might serve them in good stead in case they were disappointed of finding their uncle at once.

"It would be better for Spring to have a little more rest," thought Stephen, thus mitigating his own

longing to escape from the monks and friars, of whom Winchester seemed to be full.

They had a kindly welcome in the pretty little college of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, lying in the meadows between William of Wykeham's College and the round hill of St. Catharine. The Warden was a more scholarly and ecclesiastical-looking person than his friend, the good-natured Augustinian. After commending them to his care, and partaking of a drink of mead, the monk of Silkstede took leave of the youths, with a hearty blessing and advice to husband their few crowns, not to tell every one of their tokens, and to follow the counsel of the Warden of St. Elizabeth's, assuring them that if they turned back to the Forest, they should have a welcome at Silkstede. Moreover he patted Spring pitifully, and wished him and his master well through the journey.

St. Elizabeth's College was a hundred years older than its neighbour St. Mary's, as was evident to practised eyes by its arches and windows, but it had been so entirely eclipsed by Wykeham's foundation that the number of priests, students, and choir-boys it was intended to maintain, had dwindled away, so

that it now contained merely the Warden, a superannuated priest, and a couple of big lads who acted as servants. There was an air of great quietude and coolness about the pointed arches of its tiny cloister on that summer's day, with the old monk dozing in his chair over the manuscript he thought he was reading, not far from the little table where the Warden was eagerly studying Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*. But the Birkenholts were of the age at which quiet means dulness, at least Stephen was, and the Warden had pity both on them and on himself; and hearing joyous shouts outside, he opened a little door in the cloister wall, and revealed a multitude of lads with their black gowns tucked up "a playing at the ball"—these being the scholars of St. Mary's. Beckoning to a pair of elder ones, who were walking up and down more quietly, he consigned the strangers to their care, sweetening the introduction by an invitation to supper, for which he would gain permission from their Warden.

One of the young Wykehamists was shy and churlish, and sheered off from the brothers, but the other catechised them on their views of becoming

scholars in the college. He pointed out the cloister where the studies took place in all weathers, showed them the hall, the chapel, and the chambers, and expatiated on the chances of attaining to New College. Being moreover a scholarly fellow, he and Ambrose fell into a discussion over the passage of Virgil, copied out on a bit of paper, which he was learning by heart. Some other scholars having finished their game, and become aware of the presence of a strange dog and two strange boys, proceeded to mob Stephen and Spring, whereupon the shy boy stood forth and declared that the Warden of St. Elizabeth's had brought them in for an hour's sport.

Of course, in such close quarters, the rival Warden was esteemed a natural enemy, and went by the name of "Old Bess," so that his recommendation went for worse than nothing, and a dash at Spring was made by the inhospitable young savages. Stephen stood to the defence in act to box, and the shy lad stood by him, calling for fair play and one at a time. Of course a fight ensued, Stephen and his champion on the one side, and two assailants on the other, till after a fall on either side, Ambrose's friend interfered with a voice as

thundering as the manly crack would permit, peace was restored, Stephen found himself free of the meads, and Spring was caressed instead of being tormented.

Stephen was examined on his past, present, and future, envied for his Forest home, and beguiled into magnificent accounts, not only of the deer that had fallen to his bow and the boars that had fallen to his father's spear, but of the honours to which his uncle in the Archbishop's household would prefer him—for he viewed it as an absolute certainty that his kinsman was captain among the men-at-arms, whom he endowed on the spot with scarlet coats faced with black velvet, and silver medals and chains.

Whereat one of the other boys was not behind in telling how his father was pursuivant to my Lord Duke of Norfolk, and never went abroad save with silver lions broidered on back and breast, and trumpets going before; and another dwelt on the splendours of the mayor and aldermen of Southampton with their chains and cups of gold. Stephen felt bound to surpass this with the last report that my Lord of York's men rode Flemish steeds in crimson velvet housings, passmented

with gold and gems, and of course his uncle had the leading of them.

"Who be thine uncle?" demanded a thin, squeaky voice. "I have brothers likewise in my Lord of York's meiné."

"Mine uncle is Captain Harry Randall, of Shirley," quoth Stephen magnificently, scornfully surveying the small proportions of the speaker. "What is thy brother?"

"Head turnspit," said a rude voice, provoking a general shout of laughter; but the boy stood his ground, and said hotly: "He is page to the comptroller of my lord's household, and waits at the second table, and I know every one of the captains."

"He'll say next he knows every one of the Seven Worthies," cried another boy, for Stephen was becoming a popular character.

"And all the paladins to boot. Come on, little Rowley!" was the cry.

"I tell you my brother is page to the comptroller of the household, and my mother dwells beside the Gate House, and I know every man of them," insisted Rowley, waxing hot. "As for that Forest savage

fellow's uncle being captain of the guard, 'tis more like that he is my lord's fool, Quipsome Hal!"

Whereat there was a cry, in which were blended exultation at the hit, and vituperation of the hitter. Stephen flew forward to avenge the insult, but a big bell was beginning to ring, a whole wave of black gowns rushed to obey it, sweeping little Rowley away with them; and Stephen found himself left alone with his brother and the two lads who had been invited to St. Elizabeth's, and who now repaired thither with them.

The supper party in the refectory was a small one, and the rule of the foundation limited the meal to one dish and a pittance, but the dish was of savoury eels, and the Warden's good nature had added to it some cates and comfits in consideration of his youthful guests.

After some conversation with the elder Wykehamist, the Warden called Ambrose and put him through an examination on his attainments, which proved so satisfactory, that it ended in an invitation to the brothers to fill two of the empty scholarships of the college of the dear St. Elizabeth. It was a good offer, and one

that Ambrose would fain have accepted, but Stephen had no mind for the cloister or for learning.

The Warden had no doubt that he could be apprenticed in the city of Winchester, since the brother at home had in keeping a sum sufficient for the fee. Though the trade of "capping" had fallen off, there were still good substantial burgesses who would be willing to receive an active lad of good parentage, some being themselves of gentle blood. Stephen, however, would not brook the idea. "Out upon you, Ambrose!" said he, "to desire to bind your own brother to base mechanical arts."

"'Tis what Nurse Joan held to be best for us both," said Ambrose.

"Joan! Yea, like a woman, who deems a man safest when he is a tailor, or a perfumer. An you be minded to stay here with a black gown and a shaven crown, I shall on with Spring and come to preferment. Maybe thou'lt next hear of me when I have got some fat canonry for thee."

"Nay, I quit thee not," said Ambrose. "If thou fare forward, so do I. But I would thou couldst have brought thy mind to rest there."

"What! wouldst thou be content with this worn-out place, with more churches than houses, and more empty houses than full ones? No! let us on where there is something doing! Thou wilt see that my Lord of York will have room for the scholar as well as the man-at-arms."

So the kind offer was declined, but Ambrose was grieved to see that the Warden thought him foolish, and perhaps ungrateful.

Nevertheless the good man gave them a letter to the Reverend Master Alworthy, singing clerk at St. Paul's Cathedral, telling Ambrose it might serve them in case they failed to find their uncle, or if my Lord of York's household should not be in town. He likewise gave them a recommendation which would procure them a night's lodging at the Grange, and after the morning's mass and meat, sped them on their way with his blessing, muttering to himself, "That elder one might have been the staff of mine age! Pity on him to be lost in the great and evil City! Yet 'tis a good lad to follow that fiery spark his brother. *Tanquam agnus inter lupos.* Alack!"

CHAPTER IV.

A HERO'S FALL.

"These four came all afront and mainly made at me. I made no more ado, but took their seven points on my target—thus—"

SHAKESPEARE.

THE journey to Alton was eventless. It was slow, for the day was a broiling one, and the young foresters missed their oaks and beeches, as they toiled over the chalk downs that rose and sank in endless succession; though they would hardly have slackened their pace if it had not been for poor old Spring, who was sorely distressed by the heat and the want of water on the downs. Every now and then he lay down, panting distressfully, with his tongue hanging out, and his young masters always waited for him, often themselves not sorry to rest in the fragment of shade from a solitary thorn or juniper.

The track was plain enough, and there were hamlets at long intervals. Flocks of sheep fed on the short grass, but there was no approaching the shepherds, as they and their dogs regarded Spring as an enemy, to be received with clamour, stones, and teeth, in spite of the dejected looks which might have acquitted him of evil intentions.

The travellers reached Alton in the cool of the evening, and were kindly received by a monk, who had charge of a grange just outside the little town, near one of the springs of the River Wey.

The next day's journey was a pleasanter one, for there was more of wood and heather, and they had to skirt round the marshy borders of various bogs. Spring was happier, being able to stop and lap whenever he would, and the whole scene was less unfriendly to them. But they scarcely made speed enough, for they were still among tall whins and stiff scrub of heather when the sun began to get low, gorgeously lighting the tall plumes of golden broom, and they had their doubts whether they might not be off the track; but in such weather, there was nothing alarming in spending a night out of doors, if only they

had something for supper. Stephen took a bolt from the purse at his girdle, and bent his crossbow, so as to be ready in case a rabbit sprang out, or a duck flew up from the marshes.

A small thicket of trees was in sight, and they were making for it, when sounds of angry voices were heard, and Spring, bristling up the mane on his neck, and giving a few premonitory fierce growls like thunder, bounded forward as though he had been seven years younger. Stephen darted after him, Ambrose rushed after Stephen, and breaking through the trees, they beheld the dog at the throat of one of three men. As they came on the scene, the dog was torn down and hurled aside, giving a howl of agony, which infuriated his master. Letting fly his crossbow bolt full at the fellow's face, he dashed on, reckless of odds, waving his knotted stick, and shouting with rage. Ambrose, though more aware of the madness of such an assault, still hurried to his support, and was amazed as well as relieved to find the charge effectual. Without waiting to return a blow, the miscreants took to their heels, and Stephen, seeing nothing but his dog, dropped on his knees beside the quivering creature, from whose

neck blood was fast pouring. One glance of the faithful wistful eyes, one feeble movement of the expressive tail, and Spring had made his last farewell! That was all Stephen was conscious of; but Ambrose could hear the cry, "Good sirs, good lads, set me free!" and was aware of a portly form bound to a tree. As he cut the rope with his knife, the rescued traveller hurried out thanks and demands—"Where are the rest of you?" and on the reply that there were no more, proceeded, "Then we must on, on at once, or the villains will return! They must have thought you had a band of hunters behind you. Two furlongs hence, and we shall be safe in the hostel at Dogmersfield. Come on, my boy," to Stephen, "the brave hound is quite dead, more's the pity. Thou canst do no more for him, and we shall soon be in his case if we dally here."

"I cannot, cannot leave him thus," sobbed Stephen, who had the loving old head on his knees. "Ambrose! stay, we must bring him. There, his tail wagged! If the blood were staunched—"

"Stephen! Indeed he is stone dead! Were he our brother we could not do otherwise," reasoned Ambrose, forcibly dragging his brother to his feet. "Go on we

must. Wouldst have us all slaughtered for his sake? Come! The rogues will be upon us anon. Spring saved this good man's life. Undo not his work. See! Is yonder your horse, sir? This way, Stevie!"

The instinct of catching the horse roused Stephen, and it was soon accomplished, for the steed was a plump, docile, city-bred palfrey, with dapple-grey flanks like well-stuffed satin pincushions, by no means resembling the shaggy Forest ponies of the boys' experience, but quite astray in the heath, and ready to come at the master's whistle, and call of "Soh! Soh!—now Poppet!" Stephen caught the bridle, and Ambrose helped the burgess into the saddle. "Now, good boys," he said, "each of you lay a hand on my pommel. We can make good speed ere the rascals find out our scant numbers."

"You would make better speed without us, sir," said Stephen, hankering to remain beside poor Spring.

"D'ye think Giles Headley the man to leave two children, that have maybe saved my life as well as my purse, to bear the malice of the robbers?" demanded the burgess angrily. "That were like those fellows of mine who have shown their heels and left their master

strapped to a tree! Thou! thou! what's thy name, that hast the most wit, bring thy brother, unless thou wouldst have him laid by the side of his dog."

Stephen was forced to comply, and run by Poppet's side, though his eyes were so full of tears that he could not see his way, even when the pace slackened, and in the twilight they found themselves among houses and gardens, and thus in safety, the lights of an inn shining not far off.

A figure came out in the road to meet them, crying, "Master! master! is it you? and without scathe? Oh, the saints be praised!"

"Ay, Tibble, 'tis I and no other, thanks to the saints and to these brave lads! What, man, I blame thee not, I know thou canst not strike; but where be the rest?"

"In the inn, sir. I strove to call up the hue and cry to come to the rescue, but the cowardly hinds were afraid of the thieves, and not one would come forth."

"I wish they may not be in league with them," said Master Headley. "See! I was delivered—ay, and in time to save my purse, by these twain and their good dog. Are ye from these parts, my fair lads?"

"We be journeying from the New Forest to London,' said Ambrose. "The poor dog heard the tumult, and leapt to your aid, sir, and we made after him."

"'Twas the saints sent him!" was the fervent answer. "And" (with a lifting of the cap) "I hereby vow to St. Julian a hound of solid bronze a foot in length, with a collar of silver, to his shrine in St. Faith's, in token of my deliverance in body and goods! To London are ye bound? Then will we journey on together!"

They were by this time near the porch of a large country hostel, from the doors and large bay window of which light streamed out. And as the casement was open, those without could both see and hear all that was passing within.

The table was laid for supper, and in the place of honour sat a youth of some seventeen or eighteen years, gaily dressed, with a little feather curling over his crimson cap, and thus discoursing:—

"Yea, my good host, two of the rogues bear my tokens, besides him whom I felled to the earth. He came on at me with his sword, but I had my point ready for him; and down he went before me like an

ox. Then came on another, but him I dealt with by the back stroke as used in the tilt-yard at Clarendon."

"I trow we shall know him again, sir. Holy saints! to think such rascals should haunt so nigh us," the hostess was exclaiming. "Pity for the poor goodman, Master Headley. A portly burgher was he, friendly of tongue and free of purse. I well remember him when he went forth on his way to Salisbury, little thinking, poor soul, what was before him. And is he truly sped?"

"I tell thee, good woman, I saw him go down before three of their pikes. What more could I do but drive my horse over the nearest rogue who was rifling him?"

"If he were still alive—which Our Lady grant!—the knaves will hold him to ransom," quoth the host, as he placed a tankard on the table.

"I am afraid he is past ransom," said the youth, shaking his head. "But an if he be still in the rogues' hands and living, I will get me on to his house in Cheapside, and arrange with his mother to find the needful sum, as befits me, I being his heir and about to wed his daughter. However, I shall do all that in me lies to get the poor old seignior out of the hands of the rogues. Saints defend me!"

"The poor old seignior is much beholden to thee," said Master Headley, advancing amid a clamour of exclamations from three or four serving-men or grooms, one protesting that he thought his master was with him, another that his horse ran away with him, one showing an arm which was actually being bound up, and the youth declaring that he rode off to bring help.

"Well wast thou bringing it," Master Headley answered. "I might be still standing bound like an eagle displayed, against yonder tree, for aught you fellows recked."

"Nay, sir, the odds—" began the youth.

"Odds! such odds as were put to rout—by what, deem you? These two striplings and one poor hound. Had but one of you had the heart of a sparrow, ye had not furnished a tale to be the laugh of the Barbican and Cheapside. Look well at them. How old be you, my brave lads?"

"I shall be sixteen come Lammas day, and Stephen fifteen at Martinmas day, sir," said Ambrose; "but verily we did nought. We could have done nought had not the thieves thought more were behind us."

"There are odds between going forward and

backward," said Master Headley, dryly. "Ha! Art hurt? Thou bleedst," he exclaimed, laying his hand on Stephen's shoulder, and drawing him to the light.

"'Tis no blood of mine," said Stephen, as Ambrose likewise came to join in the examination. "It is my poor Spring's. He took the coward's blow. His was all the honour, and we have left him there on the heath!" And he covered his face with his hands.

"Come, come, my good child," said Master Headley; "we will back to the place by times to-morrow when rogues hide and honest men walk abroad. Thou shalt bury thine hound, as befits a good warrior, on the battle-field. I would fain mark his points for the effigy we will frame, honest Tibble, for St. Julian. And mark ye, fellows, thou godson Giles, above all, who 'tis that boast of their valour, and who 'tis that be modest of speech. Yea, thanks, mine host. Let us to a chamber, and give us water to wash away soil of travel and of fray, and then to supper. Young masters, ye are my guests. Shame were it that Giles Headley let go farther them that have, under Heaven and St. Julian, saved him in life, limb, and purse."

The inn was large, being the resort of many travellers from the south, often of nobles and knights riding to Parliament, and thus the brothers found themselves accommodated with a chamber, where they could prepare for the meal, while Ambrose tried to console his brother by representing that, after all, poor Spring had died gallantly, and with far less pain than if he had suffered a wasting old age, besides being honoured for ever by his effigy in St. Faith's, wherever that might be, the idea which chiefly contributed to console his master.

The two boys appeared in the room of the inn looking so unlike the dusty, blood-stained pair who had entered, that Master Headley took a second glance to convince himself that they were the same, before beckoning them to seats on either side of him, saying that he must know more of them, and bidding the host load their trenchers well from the grand fabric of beef-pasty which had been set at the end of the board. The runaways, four or five in number, herded together lower down, with a few travellers of lower degree, all except the youth who had been boasting before their arrival, and who retained his seat at the board,

thumping it with the handle of his knife to show his impatience for the commencement of supper; and not far off sat Tibble, the same who had hailed their arrival, a thin, slight, one-sided looking person, with a terrible red withered scar on one cheek, drawing the corner of his mouth awry. He, like Master Headley himself, and the rest of his party were clad in red, guarded with white, and wore the cross of St. George on the white border of their flat crimson caps, being no doubt in the livery of their Company. The citizen himself, having in the meantime drawn his conclusions from the air and gestures of the brothers, and their mode of dealing with their food, asked the usual question in an affirmative tone, "Ye be of gentle blood, young sirs?"

To which they replied by giving their names, and explaining that they were journeying from the New Forest to find their uncle in the train of the Archbishop of York.

"Birkenholt," said Tibble, meditatively. "He beareth vert, a buck's head proper, on a chief argent, two arrows in saltire. Crest, a buck courant, pierced in the gorge by an arrow, all proper."

To which the brothers returned by displaying the handles of their knives, both of which bore the pierced and courant buck.

"Ay, ay," said the man. "'Twill be found in our books, sir. We painted the shield and new-crested the morion the first year of my prenticeship, when the Earl of Richmond, the late King Harry of blessed memory, had newly landed at Milford Haven."

"Verily," said Ambrose, "our uncle Richard Birkenholt fought at Bosworth under Sir Richard Pole's banner."

"A tall and stalwart esquire, methinks," said Master Headley. "Is he the kinsman you seek?"

"Not so, sir. We visited him at Winchester, and found him sorely old and with failing wits. We be on our way to our mother's brother, Master Harry Randall."

"Is he clerk or layman? My Lord of York entertaineth enow of both," said Master Headley.

"Lay assuredly, sir," returned Stephen; "I trust to him to find me some preferment as page or the like."

"Know'st thou the man, Tibble?" inquired the master.

"Not among the men-at-arms, sir," was the answer; "but there be a many of them whose right names we never hear. However, he will be easily found if my Lord of York be returned from Windsor with his train."

"Then will we go forward together, my young Masters Birkenholt. I am not going to part with my doughty champions!"—patting Stephen's shoulder. "Ye'd not think that these light-heeled knaves belonged to the brave craft of armourers?"

"Certainly not," thought the lads, whose notion of armourers was derived from the brawny blacksmith of Lyndhurst, who sharpened their boar spears and shod their horses. They made some kind of assent, and Master Headley went on. "These be the times! This is what peace hath brought us to! I am called down to Salisbury to take charge of the goods, chattels, and estate of my kinsman, Robert Headley—Saints rest his soul!—and to bring home yonder spark, my godson, whose indentures have been made over to me. And I may not ride a mile after sunset without being set upon by a sort of robbers, who must have guessed over-well what a pack of cowards they had to deal with."

"Sir," cried the younger Giles, "I swear to you that I struck right and left. I did all that man could do, but these rogues of serving-men, they fled, and dragged me along with them, and I deemed you were of our company till we dismounted."

"Did you so? Methought anon you saw me go down with three pikes in my breast. Come, come, godson Giles, speech will not mend it! Thou art but a green, town-bred lad, a mother's darling, and mayst be a brave man yet, only don't dread to tell the honest truth that you were afeard, as many a better man might be."

The host chimed in with tales of the thieves and outlaws who then, and indeed for many later generations, infested Bagshot heath, and the wild moorland tracks around. He seemed to think that the travellers had had a hair's-breadth escape, and that a few seconds' more delay might have revealed the weakness of the rescuers and have been fatal to them.

However there was no danger so near the village in the morning, and, somewhat to Stephen's annoyance, the whole place turned out to inspect the spot, and behold the burial of poor Spring, who was found

stretched on the heather, just as he had been left the night before. He was interred under the stunted oak where Master Headley had been tied. While the grave was dug with a spade borrowed at the inn, Ambrose undertook to cut out the dog's name on the bark, but he had hardly made the first incision when Tibble, the singed foreman, offered to do it for him, and made a much more sightly inscription than he could have done. Master Headley's sword was found honourably broken under the tree, and was reserved to form a base for his intended *ex voto*. He uttered the vow in due form like a funeral oration, when Stephen, with a swelling heart, had laid the companion of his life in the little grave, which was speedily covered in.

CHAPTER V.

THE DRAGON COURT.

"A citizen
Of credit and renown;
A trainband captain eke was he
Of famous London town."

COWPER.

IN spite of his satisfaction at the honourable obsequies of his dog, Stephen Birkenholt would fain have been independent, and thought it provoking and strange that every one should want to direct his movements, and assume the charge of one so well able to take care of himself; but he could not escape as he had done before from the Warden of St. Elizabeth, for Ambrose had readily accepted the proposal that they should travel in Master Headley's company, only objecting that they were on foot; on which the good citizen hired a couple of hackneys for them.

Besides the two Giles Headleys, the party consisted of Tibble, the scarred and withered foreman, two grooms, and two serving-men, all armed with the swords and bucklers of which they had made so little use. It appeared in process of time that the two namesakes, besides being godfather and godson, were cousins, and that Robert, the father of the younger one, had, after his apprenticeship in the paternal establishment at Salisbury, served for a couple of years in the London workshop of his kinsman to learn the latest improvements in weapons. This had laid the foundation of a friendship which had lasted through life, though the London cousin had been as prosperous as the country one had been the reverse. The provincial trade in arms declined with the close of the York and Lancaster wars. Men were not permitted to turn from one handicraft to another, and Robert Headley had neither aptitude nor resources. His wife was vain and thriftless, and he finally broke down under his difficulties, appointing by will his cousin to act as his executor, and to take charge of his only son, who had served out half his time as apprentice to himself. There had been delay until the peace with France had given the armourer some leisure

for an expedition to Salisbury, a serious undertaking for a London burgess, who had little about him of the ancient northern weapon-smith, and had wanted to avail himself of the protection of the suite of the Bishop of Salisbury, returning from Parliament. He had spent some weeks in disposing of his cousin's stock in trade, which was far too antiquated for the London market; also of the premises, which were bought by an adjoining convent to extend its garden; and he had divided the proceeds between the widow and children. He had presided at the wedding of the last daughter, with whom the mother was to reside, and was on his way back to London with his godson, who had now become his apprentice.

Giles Headley the younger was a fine tall youth, but clumsy and untrained in the use of his limbs, and he rode a large, powerful brown horse, which brooked no companionship, lashing out with its shaggy hoofs at any of its kind that approached it, more especially at poor, plump, mottled Poppet. The men said he had insisted on retaining that, and no other, for his journey to London, contrary to all advice, and he was obliged to ride foremost, alone in the middle of the road; while Master

Headley seemed to have an immense quantity of consultation to carry on with his foreman, Tibble, whose quiet-looking brown animal was evidently on the best of terms with Poppet. By daylight Tibble looked even more sallow, lean, and sickly, and Stephen could not help saying to the serving-man nearest to him, "Can such a weakling verily be an armourer?"

"Yea, sir. Wry-mouthed Tibble, as they call him, was a sturdy fellow till he got a fall against the mouth of a furnace, and lay ten months in St. Bartholomew's Spital, scarce moving hand or foot. He cannot wield a hammer, but he has a cunning hand for gilding, and coloured devices, and is as good as Garter-king-at-arms himself for all bearings of knights and nobles."

"As we heard last night," said Stephen.

"Moreover in the spital he learnt to write and cast accompts like a very scrivener, and the master trusts him more than any, except maybe Kit Smallbones, the head smith."

"What will Smallbones think of the new prentice!" said one of the other men.

"Prentice! 'Tis plain enough what sort of prentice

the youth is like to be who beareth the name of a master with one only daughter."

An emphatic grunt was the only answer, while Ambrose pondered on the good luck of some people, who had their futures cut out for them with no trouble on their own part.

This day's ride was through more inhabited parts, and was esteemed less perilous. They came in sight of the Thames at Lambeth, but Master Headley, remembering how ill his beloved Poppet had brooked the ferry, decided to keep to the south of the river by a causeway across Lambeth marsh, which was just passable in high and dry summers, and which conducted them to a raised road called Bankside, where they looked across to the towers of Westminster, and the Abbey in its beauty dawned on the imagination of Stephen and Ambrose. The royal standard floated over the palace, whence Master Headley perceived that the King was there, and augured that my Lord of York's meiné would not be far to seek. Then came broad green fields with young corn growing, or hay waving for the scythe, the tents and booths of May Fair, and the beautiful Market Cross in the midst of

the village of Charing, while the Strand, immediately opposite, began to be fringed with great monasteries within their ample gardens, with here and there a nobleman's castellated house and terraced garden, with broad stone stairs leading to the Thames.

Barges and wherries plied up and down, the former often gaily canopied and propelled by liveried oarsmen, all plying their arms in unison, so that the vessel looked like some brilliant many-limbed creature treading the water. Presently appeared the heavy walls inclosing the City itself, dominated by the tall openwork timber spire of St. Paul's, with the four-square, four-turreted Tower acting, as it has been well said, as a padlock to a chain, and the river's breadth spanned by London bridge, a very street of houses built on the abutments. Now, Bankside had houses on each side of the road, and Wry-mouthed Tibble showed evident satisfaction when they turned to cross the bridge, where they had to ride in single file, not without some refractoriness on the part of young Headley's steed.

On they went, now along streets where each story of the tall houses projected over the last, so that the

gables seemed ready to meet; now beside walls of convent gardens, now past churches, while the country lads felt bewildered with the numbers passing to and fro, and the air was full of bells.

Cap after cap was lifted in greeting to Master Headley by burgess, artisan, or apprentice, and many times did he draw Poppet's rein to exchange greetings and receive congratulations on his return. On reaching St. Paul's Minster, he halted and bade the servants take home the horses, and tell the mistress, with his dutiful greetings, that he should be at home anon, and with guests.

"We must e'en return thanks for our safe journey and great deliverance," he said to his young companions, and thrusting his arm into that of a russet-vested citizen, who met him at the door, he walked into the cathedral, recounting his adventure.

The youths followed with some difficulty through the stream of loiterers in the nave, Giles the younger elbowing and pushing so that several of the crowd turned to look at him, and it was well that his kinsman soon astonished him by descending a stair into a crypt, with solid, short, clustered columns, and high-pitched

vaulting, fitted up as a separate church, namely that of the parish of St. Faith. The great cathedral, having absorbed the site of the original church, had given this crypt to the parishioners. Here all was quiet and solemn, in marked contrast to the hubbub in "Paul's Walk," above in the nave. Against the eastern pillar of one of the bays was a little altar, and the decorations included St. Julian, the patron of travellers, with his saltire doubly crossed, and his stag beside him. Little ships, trees, and wonderful enamelled representations of perils by robbers, field and flood, hung thickly on St. Julian's pillar, and on the wall and splay of the window beside it; and here, after crossing himself, Master Headley rapidly repeated a Paternoster, and ratified his vow of presenting a bronze image of the hound to whom he owed his rescue. One of the clergy came up to register the vow, and the good armourer proceeded to bespeak a mass of thanksgiving on the next morning, also ten for the soul of Master John Birkenholt, late Verdurer of the New Forest in Hampshire—a mode of showing his gratitude which the two sons highly appreciated.

Then, climbing up the steps again, and emerging

from the cathedral by the west door, the boys beheld a scene for which their experiences of Romsey, and even of Winchester, had by no means prepared them. It was five o'clock on a summer evening, so that the whole place was full of stir. Old women sat with baskets of rosaries and little crosses, or images of saints, on the steps of the cathedral, while in the open space beyond, more than one horse was displaying his paces for the benefit of some undecided purchaser, who had been chaffering for hours in Paul's Walk. Merchants in the costume of their countries, Lombard, Spanish, Dutch, or French, were walking away in pairs, attended by servants, from their Exchange, likewise in the nave. Women, some alone, some protected by serving-men or apprentices, were returning from their orisons, or, it might be, from their gossipings. Priests and friars, as usual, pervaded everything, and round the open space were galleried buildings with stalls beneath them, whence the holders were removing their wares for the night. The great octagonal structure of Paul's Cross stood in the centre, and just beneath the stone pulpit, where the sermons were wont to be preached, stood a man with a throng round him, declaiming a ballad at

the top of his sing-song voice, and causing much loud laughter by some ribaldry about monks and friars.

Master Headley turned aside as quickly as he could, through Paternoster Row, which was full of stalls, where little black books, and larger sheets printed in black-letter, seemed the staple commodities, and thence the burgess, keeping a heedful eye on his young companions among all his greetings, entered the broader space of Cheapside, where numerous prentice lads seemed to be playing at different sports after the labours of the day.

Passing under an archway surmounted by a dragon with shining scales, Master Headley entered a paved courtyard, where the lads started at the figures of two knights in full armour, their lances in rest, and their horses with housings down to their hoofs, apparently about to charge any intruder. But at that moment there was a shriek of joy, and out from the scarlet and azure petticoats of the nearest steed, there darted a little girl, crying, "Father! father!" and in an instant she was lifted in Master Headley's arms, and was clinging round his neck, while he kissed and blessed her, and as he set her on her feet, he said,

"Here, Dennet, greet thy cousin Giles Headley, and these two brave young gentlemen. Greet them like a courteous maiden, or they will think thee a little town mouse."

In truth the child had a pointed little visage, and bright brown eyes, somewhat like a mouse, but it was a very sweet face that she lifted obediently to be kissed not only by the kinsman, but by the two guests. Her father meantime was answering with nods to the respectful welcomes of the workmen, who thronged out below, and their wives looking down from the galleries above; while Poppet and the other horses were being rubbed down after their journey.

The ground-floor of the buildings surrounding the oblong court seemed to be entirely occupied by forges, workshops, warehouses and stables. Above, were open railed galleries, with outside stairs at intervals, giving access to the habitations of the workpeople on three sides. The fourth, opposite to the entrance, had a much handsomer, broad, stone stair, adorned on one side with a stone figure of the princess fleeing from the dragon, and on the other of St. George piercing the monster's open mouth with his lance, the scaly

convolutions of the two dragons forming the supports of the handrail on either side. Here stood, cap in hand, showing his thick curly hair, and with open front, displaying a huge hairy chest, a giant figure, whom his master greeted as Kit Smallbones, inquiring whether all had gone well during his absence.

"'Tis time you were back, sir, for there's a great tilting match on hand for the Lady Mary's wedding. Here have been half the gentlemen in the Court after you, and my Lord of Buckingham sent twice for you since Sunday, and once for Tibble Steelman, and his squire swore that if you were not at his bidding before noon to-morrow, he would have his new suit of Master Hillyer of the Eagle."

"He shall see me when it suiteth me," said Mr. Headley coolly. "He wotteth well that Hillyer hath none who can burnish plate armour like Tibble here."

"Moreover the last iron we had from that knave Mepham is nought. It works short under the hammer."

"That shall be seen to, Kit. The rest of the budget to-morrow. I must on to my mother."

For at the doorway, at the head of the stairs, there stood the still trim and active figure of an old woman,

with something of the mouse likeness seen in her grand-daughter, in the close cap, high hat, and cloth dress, that sumptuary opinion, if not law, prescribed for the burgher matron, a white apron, silver chain and bunch of keys at her girdle. Due and loving greetings passed between mother and son, after the longest and most perilous absence of Master Headley's life, and he then presented Giles, to whom the kindly dame offered hand and cheek, saying, "Welcome, my young kinsman, your good father was well known and liked here. May you tread in his steps!"

"Thanks, good mistress," returned Giles. "I am thought to have a pretty taste in the fancy part of the trade. My Lord of Montagu—"

Before he could get any farther, Mistress Headley was inquiring what was the rumour she had heard of robbers and dangers that had beset her son, and he was presenting the two young Birkenholts to her. "Brave boys! good boys," she said, holding out her hands and kissing each according to the custom of welcome, "you have saved my son for me, and this little one's father for her. Kiss them, Dennet, and thank them."

"It was the poor dog," said the child, in a clear little

voice, drawing back with a certain quaint coquetting shyness; "I would rather kiss him."

"Would that thou couldst, little mistress," said Stephen. "My poor brave Spring!"

"Was he thine own? Tell me all about him," said Dennet, somewhat imperiously.

She stood between the two strangers looking eagerly up with sorrowfully interested eyes, while Stephen, out of his full heart, told of his faithful comradeship with his hound from the infancy of both. Her father meanwhile was exchanging serious converse with her grandmother, and Giles finding himself left in the background, began: "Come hither, pretty coz, and I will tell thee of my Lady of Salisbury's dainty little hounds."

"I care not for dainty little hounds," returned Dennet; "I want to hear of the poor faithful dog that flew at the wicked robber."

"A mighty stir about a mere chance," muttered Giles.

"I know what *you* did," said Dennet, turning her bright brown eyes full upon him. "You took to your heels."

Her look and little nod were so irresistibly comical

that the two brothers could not help laughing; whereupon Giles Headley turned upon them in a passion.

"What mean ye by this insolence, you beggars' brats picked up on the heath?"

"Better born than thou, braggart and coward that thou art!" broke forth Stephen, while Master Headley exclaimed, "How now, lads? No brawling here!"

Three voices spoke at once.

"They were insolent."

"He reviled our birth."

"Father! they did but laugh when I told cousin Giles that he took to his heels, and he must needs call them beggars' brats picked up on the heath."

"Ha! ha! wench, thou art woman enough already to set them together by the ears," said her father, laughing. "See here, Giles Headley, none who bears my name shall insult a stranger on my hearth."

Stephen however had stepped forth holding out his small stock of coin, and saying, "Sir, receive for our charges, and let us go to the tavern we passed anon."

"How now, boy! Said I not ye were my guests?"

"Yea, sir, and thanks; but we can give no cause for being called beggars nor beggars' brats."

"What beggary is there in being guests, my young gentlemen?" said the master of the house. "If any one were picked up on the heath, it was I. We owned you for gentlemen of blood and coat armour, and thy brother there can tell thee that ye have no right to put an affront on me, your host, because a rude prentice from a country town hath not learnt to rule his tongue."

Giles scowled, but the armourer spoke with an authority that imposed on all, and Stephen submitted, while Ambrose spoke a few words of thanks, after which the two brothers were conducted by an external stair and gallery to a guest-chamber, in which to prepare for supper.

The room was small, but luxuriously filled beyond all ideas of the young foresters, for it was hung with tapestry, representing the history of Joseph; the bed was curtained, there was a carved chest for clothes, a table and a ewer and basin of bright brass with the armourer's mark upon it, a twist in which the letter H and the dragon's tongue and tail were ingeniously blended. The City was far in advance of the country in all the arts of life, and only the more magnificent castles and abbeys, which the boys had never seen,

possessed the amount of comforts to be found in the dwellings of the superior class of Londoners. Stephen was inclined to look with contempt upon the effeminacy of a churl merchant.

"No churl," returned Ambrose, "if manners makyth man, as we saw at Winchester."

"Then what do they make of that cowardly clown, his cousin?"

Ambrose laughed, but said, "Prove we our gentle blood at least by not brawling with the fellow. Master Headley will soon teach him to know his place."

"That will matter nought to us. To-morrow shall we be with our uncle Hal. I only wish his lord was not of the ghostly sort, but perhaps he may prefer me to some great knight's service. But oh! Ambrose, come and look. See! The fellow they call Small-bones is come out to the fountain in the middle of the court with a bucket in each hand. Look! Didst ever see such a giant? He is as big and brawny as Ascapart at the bar-gate at Southampton. See! he lifts that big pail full and brimming as though it were an egg shell. See his arm! 'Twere good to see him wield a

hammer! I must look into his smithy before going forth to-morrow."

Stephen clenched his fist and examined his muscles ere donning his best mourning jerkin, and could scarce be persuaded to complete his toilet, so much was he entertained with the comings and goings in the court, a little world in itself, like a college quadrangle. The day's work was over, the forges out, and the smiths were lounging about at ease, one or two sitting on a bench under a large elm-tree beside the central well, enjoying each his tankard of ale. A few more were watching Poppet being combed down, and conversing with the newly-arrived grooms. One was carrying a little child in his arms, and a young man and maid sitting on the low wall round the well, seemed to be carrying on a courtship over the pitcher that stood waiting to be filled. Two lads were playing at skittles, children were running up and down the stairs and along the wooden galleries, and men and women went and came by the entrance gateway between the two effigies of knights in armour. Some were servants bringing helm or gauntlet for repair, or taking the like away. Some might be known by their flat caps to be

apprentices, and two substantial burgesses walked in together, as if to greet Master Headley on his return. Immediately after, a man-cook appeared with white cap and apron, bearing aloft a covered dish surrounded by a steamy cloud, followed by other servants bearing other meats; a big bell began to sound, the younger men and apprentices gathered together and the brothers descended the stairs, and entered by the big door into the same large hall where they had been received. The spacious hearth was full of green boughs, with a beaupot of wild rose, honeysuckle, clove pinks and gilliflowers; the lower parts of the walls were hung with tapestry representing the adventures of St. George; the mullioned windows had their upper squares filled with glass, bearing the shield of the City of London, that of the Armourers' Company, the rose and portcullis of the King, the pomegranate of Queen Catharine, and other like devices. Others, belonging to the Lancastrian kings, adorned the pendants from the handsome open roof and the front of a gallery for musicians which crossed one end of the hall in the taste of the times of Henry V. and Whittington.

Far more interesting to the hungry travellers was it

that the long table, running the whole breadth of the apartment, was decked with snowy linen, trenchers stood ready with horns or tankards beside them, and loaves of bread at intervals, while the dishes were being placed on the table. The master and his entire establishment took their meals together, except the married men, who lived in the quadrangle with their families. There was no division by the salt-cellar, as at the tables of the nobles and gentry, but the master, his family and guests, occupied the centre, with the hearth behind them, where the choicest of the viands were placed; next after them were the places of the journeymen according to seniority, then those of the apprentices, household servants, and stable-men, but the apprentices had to assist the serving-men in waiting on the master and his party before sitting down themselves. There was a dignity and regularity about the whole, which could not fail to impress Stephen and Ambrose with the weight and importance of a London burgher, warden of the Armourers' Company, and alderman of the Ward of Cheap. There were carved chairs for himself, his mother, and the guests, also a small Persian carpet extending from the hearth beyond their seats.

This article filled the two foresters with amazement. To put one's feet on what ought to be a coverlet! They would not have stepped on it, had they not been kindly summoned by old Mistress Headley to take their places among the company, which consisted, besides the family, of the two citizens who had entered, and of a priest who had likewise dropped in to welcome Master Headley's return, and had been invited to stay to supper. Young Giles, as a matter of course, placed himself amongst them, at which there were black looks and whispers among the apprentices, and even Mistress Headley wore an air of amazement.

"Mother," said the head of the family, speaking loud enough for all to hear, "you will permit our young kinsman to be placed as our guest this evening. To-morrow he will act as an apprentice, as we all have done in our time."

"I never did so at home!" cried Giles, in his loud, hasty voice.

"I trow not," dryly observed one of the guests.

Giles, however, went on muttering while the priest was pronouncing a Latin grace, and thereupon the same burgess observed, "Never did I see it better

proved that folk in the country give their sons no good breeding."

"Have patience with him, good Master Pepper," returned Mr. Headley. "He hath been an only son, greatly cockered by father, mother, and sisters, but ere long he will learn what is befiting."

Giles glared round, but he met nothing encouraging. Little Dennet sat with open mouth of astonishment, her grandmother looked shocked, the household which had been aggrieved by his presumption laughed at his rebuke, for there was not much delicacy in those days; but something generous in the gentle blood of Ambrose moved him to some amount of pity for the lad, who thus suddenly became conscious that the tie he had thought nominal at Salisbury, a mere preliminary to municipal rank, was here absolute subjection, and a bondage whence there was no escape. His was the only face that Giles met which had any friendliness in it, but no one spoke, for manners imposed silence upon youth at table, except when spoken to; and there was general hunger enough prevailing to make Mistress Headley's fat capon the most interesting contemplation for the present.

The elders conversed, for there was much for Master Headley to hear of civic affairs that had passed in his absence of two months, also of all the comings and goings, and it was ascertained that my Lord Archbishop of York was at his suburban abode, York House, now Whitehall.

It was a very late supper for the times, not beginning till seven o'clock, on account of the travellers; and as soon as it was finished, and the priest and burghers had taken their leave, Master Headley dismissed the household to their beds, although daylight was scarcely departed.

CHAPTER VI.

A SUNDAY IN THE CITY.

"The rod of Heaven has touched them all,
The word from Heaven is spoken:
Rise, shine and sing, thou captive thrall,
Are not thy fetters broken?"

KEBLE.

ON Sunday morning, when the young Birkenholts awoke, the whole air seemed full of bells from hundreds of Church and Minster steeples. The Dragon Court wore a holiday air, and there was no ring of hammers at the forges; but the men who stood about were in holiday attire: and the brothers assumed their best clothes.

Breakfast was not a meal much accounted of. It was reckoned effeminate to require more than two meals a day, though, just as in the verdurer's lodge at home, there was a barrel of ale on tap with drinking horns beside it in the hall, and on a small round table

in the window a loaf of bread, to which city luxury added a cheese, and a jug containing sack, with some silver cups beside it, and a pitcher of fair water. Master Headley, with his mother and daughter, was taking a morsel of these refections, standing, and in out-door garments, when the brothers appeared at about seven o'clock in the morning.

"Ha! that's well," quoth he, greeting them. "No slugabeds, I see. Will ye come with us to hear mass at St. Faith's?" They agreed, and Master Headley then told them that if they would tarry till the next day in searching out their uncle, they could have the company of Tibble Steelman, who had to see one of the captains of the guard about an alteration of his corslet, and thus would have every opportunity of facilitating their inquiries for their uncle.

The mass was an ornate one, though not more so than they were accustomed to at Beaulieu. Ambrose had his book of devotions, supplied by the good monks who had brought him up, and old Mrs. Headley carried something of the same kind; but these did not necessarily follow the ritual, and neither quiet nor attention was regarded as requisite in "hearing mass." Dennet,

unchecked, was exchanging flowers from her Sunday posy with another little girl, and with hooded fingers carrying on in all innocence the satirical pantomime of Father Francis and Sister Catharine; and even Master Headley himself exchanged remarks with his friends, and returned greetings from burgesses and their wives while the celebrant priest's voice droned on, and the choir responded—the peals of the organ in the Minster above coming in at inappropriate moments, for there they were in a different part of High Mass using the Liturgy peculiar to St. Paul's.

Thinking of last week at Beaulieu, Ambrose knelt meantime with his head buried in his hands, in an absorption of feeling that was not perhaps wholly devout, but which at any rate looked more like devotion than the demeanour of any one around. When the *Ite missa est* was pronounced, and all rose up, Stephen touched him and he rose, looking about, bewildered.

"So please you, young sir, I can show you another sort of thing by and by," said in his ear Tibble Steelman, who had come in late, and marked his attitude.

They went up from St. Faith's in a flood of talk, with all manner of people welcoming Master Headley after his journey, and thence came back to dinner, which was set out in the hall very soon after their return from church. Quite guests enough were there on this occasion to fill all the chairs, and Master Headley intimated to Giles that he must begin his duties at table as an apprentice, under the tuition of the senior, a tall young fellow of nineteen, by name Edmund Burgess. He looked greatly injured and discomfited above all when he saw his two travelling companions seated at the table—though far lower than the night before; nor would he stir from where he was standing against the wall to do the slightest service, although Edmund admonished him sharply that unless he bestirred himself it would be the worse for him.

When the meal was over, and grace had been said, the boards were removed from their trestles, and the elders drew round the small table in the window with a flagon of sack and a plate of wastel bread in their midst to continue their discussion of weighty Town Council matters. Every one was free to make holiday, and Edmund Burgess good-naturedly invited the

strangers to come to Mile End, where there was to be shooting at the butts, and a match at singlestick was to come off between Kit Smallbones and another giant, who was regarded as the champion of the brewer's craft.

Stephen was nothing loth, especially if he might take his own crossbow; but Ambrose never had much turn for these pastimes and was in no mood for them. The familiar associations of the mass had brought the grief of orphanhood, homelessness, and uncertainty upon him with the more force. His spirit yearned after his father, and his heart was sick for his forest home. Moreover, there was the duty incumbent on a good son of saying his prayers for the repose of his father's soul. He hinted as much to Stephen, who, boy-like, answered, "Oh, we'll see to that when we get into my Lord of York's house. Masses must be plenty there. And I must see Smallbones floor the brewer."

Ambrose could trust his brother under the care of Edmund Burgess, and resolved on a double amount of repetitions of the appointed intercessions for the departed.

He was watching the party of youths set off, all

except Giles Headley, who sulkily refused the invitations, betook himself to a window and sat drumming on the glass, while Ambrose stood leaning on the dragon balustrade, with his eyes dreamily following the merry lads out at the gateway.

"You are not for such gear, sir," said a voice at his ear, and he saw the scathed face of Tibble Steelman beside him.

"Never greatly so, Tibble," answered Ambrose. "And my heart is too heavy for it now."

"Ay, ay, sir. So I thought when I saw you in St. Faith's. I have known what it was to lose a good father in my time."

Ambrose held out his hand. It was the first really sympathetic word he had heard since he had left Nurse Joan.

"'Tis the week's mind of his burial," he said, half choked with tears. "Where shall I find a quiet church where I may say his *De profundis* in peace?"

"Mayhap," returned Tibble, "the chapel in the Pardon churchyard would serve your turn. 'Tis not greatly resorted to when mass time is over, when there's no funeral in hand, and I oft go there to read

my book in quiet on a Sunday afternoon. And then, if 'tis your will, I will take you to what to my mind is the best healing for a sore heart."

"Nurse Joan was wont to say the best for that was a sight of the true Cross, as she once beheld it at Holy Rood church at Southampton," said Ambrose.

"And so it is, lad, so it is," said Tibble, with a strange light on his distorted features.

So they went forth together, while Giles again hugged himself in his doleful conceit, marvelling how a youth of birth and nurture could walk the streets on a Sunday with a scarecrow such as that!

The hour was still early, there was a whole summer afternoon before them; and Tibble, seeing how much his young companion was struck with the grand vista of church towers and spires, gave him their names as they stood, though coupling them with short dry comments on the way in which their priests too often perverted them.

The Cheap was then still in great part an open space, where boys were playing, and a tumbler was attracting many spectators; while the ballad-singer of yesterday had again a large audience, who laughed

loudly at every coarse jest broken upon mass-priests and friars.

Ambrose was horrified at the stave that met his ears, and asked how such profanity could be allowed. Tibble shrugged his shoulders, and cited the old saying, "The nearer the church"—adding, "Truth hath a voice, and will out."

"But surely this is not the truth?"

"'Tis mighty like it, sir, though it might be spoken in a more seemly fashion."

"What's this?" demanded Ambrose. "'Tis a noble house."

"That's the Bishop's palace, sir—a man that hath much to answer for."

"Liveth he so ill a life then?"

"Not so. He is no scandalous liver, but he would fain stifle all the voices that call for better things Ay, you look back at yon ballad-monger! Great folk despise the like of him, never guessing at the power there may be in such ribald stuff; while they would fain silence that which might turn men from their evil ways while yet there is time."

Tibble muttered this to himself, unheeded by

Ambrose, and then presently crossing the churchyard, where a grave was being filled up, with numerous idle children around it, he conducted the youth into a curious little chapel, empty now, but with the Host enthroned above the altar, and the trestles on which the bier had rested still standing in the narrow nave.

It was intensely still and cool, a fit place indeed for Ambrose's filial devotions, while Tibble settled himself on the step, took out a little black book, and became absorbed. Ambrose's Latin scholarship enabled him to comprehend the language of the round of devotions he was rehearsing for the benefit of his father's soul; but there was much repetition in them, and he had been so trained as to believe their correct recital was much more important than attention to their spirit, and thus, while his hands held his rosary, his eyes were fixed upon the walls where was depicted the Dance of Death. In terrible repetition, the artist had aimed at depicting every rank or class in life as alike the prey of the grisly phantom. Triple-crowned pope, scarlet-hatted cardinal, mitred prelate, priests, monks, and friars of every degree; emperors, kings, princes, nobles,

knights, squires, yeomen, every sort of trade, soldiers of all kinds, beggars, even thieves and murderers, and, in like manner, ladies of every degree, from the queen and the abbess, down to the starving beggar, were each represented as grappled with, and carried off by the crowned skeleton. There was no truckling to greatness. The bishop and abbot writhed and struggled in the grasp of Death, while the miser clutched at his gold, and if there were some nuns, and some poor ploughmen who willingly clasped his bony fingers and obeyed his summons joyfully, there were countesses and prioresses who tried to beat him off, or implored him to wait. The infant smiled in his arms, but the middle-aged fought against his scythe.

The contemplation had a most depressing effect on the boy, whose heart was still sore for his father. After the sudden shock of such a loss, the monotonous repetition of the snatching away of all alike, in the midst of their characteristic worldly employments, and the anguish and hopeless resistance of most of them, struck him to the heart. He moved between each bead to a fresh group; staring at it with fixed gaze, while his lips moved in the unconscious hope of something

consoling; till at last, hearing some uncontrollable sobs, Tibble Steelman rose and found him crouching rather than kneeling before the figure of an emaciated hermit, who was greeting the summons of the King of Terrors, with crucifix pressed to his breast, rapt countenance and outstretched arms, seeing only the Angel who hovered above. After some minutes of bitter weeping, which choked his utterance, Ambrose, feeling a friendly hand on his shoulder, exclaimed in a voice broken by sobs, "Oh, tell me, where may I go to become an anchorite! There's no other safety! I'll give all my portion, and spend all my time in prayer for my father and the other poor souls in purgatory."

Two centuries earlier, nay, even one, Ambrose would have been encouraged to follow out his purpose. As it was, Tibble gave a little dry cough and said, "Come along with me, sir, and I'll show you another sort of way."

"I want no entertainment!" said Ambrose, "I should feel only as if he," pointing to the phantom, "were at hand, clutching me with his deadly claw," and he looked over his shoulder with a shudder.

There was a box by the door to receive alms for

masses on behalf of the souls in purgatory, and here he halted and felt for the pouch at his girdle, to pour in all the contents; but Steelman said, "Hold, sir, are you free to dispose of your brother's share, you who are purse-bearer for both?"

"I would fain hold my brother to the only path of safety."

Again Tibble gave his dry cough, but added, "He is not in the path of safety who bestows that which is not his own but is held in trust. I were foully to blame if I let this grim portrayal so work on you as to lead you to beggar not only yourself, but your brother, with no consent of his."

For Tibble was no impulsive Italian, but a sober-minded Englishman of sturdy good sense, and Ambrose was reasonable enough to listen and only drop in a few groats which he knew to be his own.

At the same moment, a church bell was heard, the tone of which Steelman evidently distinguished from all the others, and he led the way out of the Pardon churchyard, over the space in front of St. Paul's. Many persons were taking the same route; citizens in gowns and gold or silver chains, their wives in tall

pointed hats; craftsmen, black-gowned scholarly men with fur caps, but there was a much more scanty proportion of priests, monks or friars, than was usual in any popular assemblage. Many of the better class of women carried folding stools, or had them carried by their servants, as if they expected to sit and wait.

"Is there a procession toward? or a relic to be displayed?" asked Ambrose, trying to recollect whose feast-day it might be.

Tibble screwed up his mouth in an extraordinary smile as he said, "Relic quotha? yea, the soothest relic there be of the Lord and Master of us all."

"Methought the true Cross was always displayed on the High Altar," said Ambrose, as all turned to a side aisle of the noble nave.

"Rather say hidden," muttered Tibble. "Thou shalt have it displayed, young sir, but neither in wood nor gilded shrine. See, here he comes who setteth it forth."

From the choir came, attended by half a dozen clergy, a small, pale man, in the ordinary dress of a priest, with a square cap on his head. He looked spare, sickly, and wrinkled, but the furrows traced lines

of sweetness, his mouth was wonderfully gentle, and there was a keen brightness about his clear grey eye. Every one rose and made obeisance as he passed along to the stone stair leading to a pulpit projecting from one of the columns.

Ambrose saw what was coming, though he had only twice before heard preaching. The children of the ante-reformation were not called upon to hear sermons; and the few exhortations given in Lent to the monks of Beaulieu were so exclusively for the religious that seculars were not invited to them. So that Ambrose had only once heard a weary and heavy discourse there plentifully garnished with Latin; and once he had stood among the throng at a wake at Millbrook, and heard a begging friar recommend the purchase of briefs of indulgence and the daily repetition of the Ave Maria by a series of extraordinary miracles for the rescue of desperate sinners, related so jocosely as to keep the crowd in a roar of laughter. He had laughed with the rest, but he could not imagine his guide, with the stern, grave eyebrows, writhen features and earnest, ironical tone, covering—as even he could detect—the deepest feeling, enjoying

such broad sallies as tickled the slow merriment of village clowns and forest deer-stealers.

All stood for a moment while the Paternoster was repeated. Then the owners of stools sat down on them, some leant on adjacent pillars, others curled themselves on the floor, but most remained on their feet as unwilling to miss a word, and of these were Tibble Steelman and his companion.

Omnis qui facit peccatum, servus est peccati, followed by the rendering in English, "Whosoever doeth sin is sin's bond thrall." The words answered well to the ghastly delineations that seemed stamped on Ambrose's brain and which followed him about into the nave, so that he felt himself in the grasp of the cruel fiend, and almost expected to feel the skeleton claw of Death about to hand him over to torment. He expected the consolation of hearing that a daily "Hail Mary," persevered in through the foulest life, would obtain that beams should be arrested in their fall, ships fail to sink, cords to hang, till such confession had been made as should insure ultimate salvation, after such a proportion of the flames of purgatory as masses and prayers might not mitigate.

But his attention was soon caught. Sinfulness stood before him not as the liability to penalty for transgressing an arbitrary rule, but as a taint to the entire being, mastering the will, perverting the senses, forging fetters out of habit, so as to be a loathsome horror paralysing and enchaining the whole being and making it into the likeness of him who brought sin and death into the world. The horror seemed to grow on Ambrose, as his boyish faults and errors rushed on his mind, and he felt pervaded by the contagion of the pestilence, abhorrent even to himself. But behold, what was he hearing now? "The bond thrall abideth not in the house for ever, but the Son abideth ever. *Si ergo Filius liberavit, verè liberi eritis.*" "If the Son should make you free, then are ye free indeed." And for the first time was the true liberty of the redeemed soul comprehensibly proclaimed to the young spirit that had begun to yearn for something beyond the outside. Light began to shine through the outward ordinances; the Church; the world, life, and death, were revealed as something absolutely new; a redeeming, cleansing, sanctifying power was made known, and seemed to inspire him with a new life, joy, and hope.

He was no longer feeling himself necessarily crushed by the fetters of death, or only delivered from absolute peril by a mechanism that had lost its heart, but he could enter into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, in process of being saved, not *in* sin but *from* sin.

It was an era in his life, and Tibble heard him sobbing, but with very different sobs from those in the Pardon chapel. When it was over, and the blessing given, Ambrose looked up from the hands which had covered his face with a new radiance in his eyes, and drew a long breath. Tibble saw that he was like one in another world, and gently led him away.

"Who is he? What is he? Is he an angel from Heaven?" demanded the boy, a little wildly, as they neared the southern door.

"If an angel be a messenger of God, I trow he is one," said Tibble. "But men call him Dr. Colet. He is Dean of St. Paul's Minster, and dwelleth in the house you see below there."

"And are such words as these to be heard every Sunday?"

"On most Sundays doth he preach here in the nave to all sorts of folk."

"I must—I must hear it again!" exclaimed Ambrose.

"Ay, ay," said Tibble, regarding him with a well-pleased face. "You are one with whom it works."

"Every Sunday!" repeated Ambrose. "Why do not all—your master and all these," pointing to the holiday crowds going to and fro—"why do they not all come to listen?"

"Master doth come by times," said Tibble, in the tone of irony that was hard to understand. "He owneth the dean as a rare preacher."

Ambrose did not try to understand. He exclaimed again, panting as if his thoughts were too strong for his words—"Lo you, that preacher—dean call ye him?—putteth a soul into what hath hitherto been to me but a dead and empty framework."

Tibble held out his hand almost unconsciously, and Ambrose pressed it. Man and boy, alike they had felt the electric current of that truth, which, suppressed and ignored among man's inventions, was coming as a new revelation to many, and was already beginning to convulse the Church and the world.

Ambrose's mind was made up on one point. Whatever he did, and wherever he went, he felt the doctrine he had just heard as needful to him as vital air, and he must be within reach of it. This, and not the hermit's cell, was what his instinct craved. He had always been a studious, scholarly boy, supposed to be marked out for a clerical life, because a book was more to him than a bow, and he had been easily trained in good habits and practices of devotion; but all in a childish manner, without going beyond simple receptiveness, until the experiences of the last week had made a man of him, or more truly, the Pardon chapel and Dean Colet's sermon had made him a new being, with the realities of the inner life opened before him.

His present feeling was relief from the hideous load he had felt while dwelling on the Dance of Death, and therewith general goodwill to all men, which found its first issue in compassion for Giles Headley, whom he found on his return seated on the steps—moody and miserable.

"Would that you had been with us," said Ambrose, sitting down beside him on the step. "Never have I heard such words as to-day."

"I would not be seen in the street with that scarecrow," murmured Giles. "If my mother could have guessed that he was to be set over me, I had never come here."

"Surely you knew that he was foreman."

"Yea, but not that I should be under him—I whom old Giles vowed should be as his own son—I that am to wed yon little brown moppet, and be master here! So, forsooth," he said, "now he treats me like any common low-bred prentice."

"Nay," said Ambrose, "an if you were his son, he would still make you serve. It's the way with all craftsmen—yea and with gentlemen's sons also. They must be pages and squires ere they can be knights."

"It never was the way at home. I was only bound prentice to my father for the name of the thing, that I might have the freedom of the city, and become head of our house."

"But how could you be a wise master without learning the craft?"

"What are journeymen for?" demanded the lad. "Had I known how Giles Headley meant to serve me, he might have gone whistle for a husband for his

wench. I would have ridden in my Lady of Salisbury's train."

"You might have had rougher usage there than here," said Ambrose. "Master Headley lays nothing on you but what he has himself proved. I would I could see you make the best of so happy a home."

"Ay, that's all very well for you, who are certain of a great man's house."

"Would that I were certified that my brother would be as well off as you, if you did but know it," said Ambrose. "Ha! here come the dishes! 'Tis supper time come on us unawares, and Stephen not returned from Mile End!"

Punctuality was not, however, exacted on these summer Sunday evenings, when practice with the bow and other athletic sports were enjoined by Government, and, moreover, the youths were with so trustworthy a member of the household as Kit Smallbones.

Sundry City magnates had come to supper with Master Headley, and whether it were the effect of Ambrose's counsel, or of the example of a handsome lad who had come with his father, one of the worshipful guild of Merchant Taylors, Giles did vouchsafe to

bestir himself in waiting, and in consideration of the effort it must have cost him, old Mrs. Headley and her son did not take notice of his blunders, but only Dennet fell into a violent fit of laughter, when he presented the stately alderman with a nutmeg under the impression that it was an overgrown peppercorn. She suppressed her mirth as well as she could, poor little thing, for it was a great offence in good manners, but she was detected, and, only child as she was, the consequence was the being banished from the table and sent to bed.

But when, after supper was over, Ambrose went out to see if there were any signs of the return of Stephen and the rest, he found the little maiden curled up in the gallery with her kitten in her arms.

"Nay!" she said, in a spoilt-child tone, "I'm not going to bed before my time for laughing at that great oaf! Nurse Alice says he is to wed me, but I won't have him! I like the pretty boy who had the good dog and saved father, and I like you, Master Ambrose. Sit down by me and tell me the story over again, and we shall see Kit Smallbones come home. I know he'll have beaten the brewer's fellow."

Before Ambrose had decided whether thus far to abet rebellion, she jumped up and cried: "Oh, I see Kit! He's got my ribbon! He has won the match!"

And down she rushed, quite oblivious of her disgrace, and Ambrose presently saw her uplifted in Kit Smallbones' brawny arms to utter her congratulations.

Stephen was equally excited. His head was full of Kit Smallbones' exploits, and of the marvels of the sports he had witnessed and joined in with fair success. He had thought Londoners poor effeminate creatures, but he found that these youths preparing for the trained bands understood all sorts of martial exercises far better than any of his forest acquaintance, save perhaps the hitting of a mark. He was half wild with a boy's enthusiasm for Kit Smallbones and Edmund Burgess, and when, after eating the supper that had been reserved for the late comers, he and his brother repaired to their own chamber, his tongue ran on in description of the feats he had witnessed and his hopes of emulating them, since he understood that Archbishop as was my Lord of York, there was a tilt-yard at York House. Ambrose, equally full of his new feelings, essayed to make his brother a sharer in them, but

Stephen entirely failed to understand more than that his book-worm brother had heard something that delighted him in his own line of scholarship, from which Stephen had happily escaped a year ago!

CHAPTER VII.

YORK HOUSE.

"Then hath he servants five or six score,
Some behind and some before;
A marvellous great company
Of which are lords and gentlemen,
With many grooms and yeomen
And also knaves among them."

Contemporary Poem on Wolsey.

EARLY were hammers ringing on anvils in the Dragon Court, and all was activity. Master Headley was giving his orders to Kit Smallbones before setting forth to take the Duke of Buckingham's commands; Giles Headley, very much disgusted, was being invested with a leathern apron, and entrusted to Edmund Burgess to learn those primary arts of furbishing which, but for his mother's vanity and his father's weakness, he would have practised four years sooner. Tibble

Steelman was superintending the arrangement of half a dozen corslets, which were to be carried by three stout porters, under his guidance, to what is now Whitehall, then the residence of the Archbishop of York, the king's prime adviser, Thomas Wolsey.

"Look you, Tib," said the kind-hearted armourer, "if those lads find not their kinsman, or find him not what they look for, bring them back hither, I cannot have them cast adrift. They are good and brave youths, and I owe a life to them."

Tibble nodded entire assent, but when the boys appeared in their mourning suits, with their bundles on their backs, they were sent back again to put on their forest green, Master Headley explaining that it was reckoned ill-omened, if not insulting, to appear before any great personage in black, unless to enhance some petition directly addressed to himself. He also bade them leave their fardels behind, as, if they tarried at York House, these could be easily sent after them.

They obeyed—even Stephen doing so with more alacrity than he had hitherto shown to Master Headley's behests; for now that the time for departure had come, he was really sorry to leave the armourer's household.

Edmund Burgess had been very good-natured to the raw country lad, and Kit Smallbones was, in his eyes, an Ascapart in strength, and a Bevis in prowess and kindliness. Mistress Headley too had been kind to the orphan lads, and these two days had given a feeling of being at home at the Dragon. When Giles wished them a moody farewell, and wished he were going with them, Stephen returned, "Ah! you don't know when you are well off."

Little Dennet came running down after them with two pinks in her hands. "Here's a sop-in-wine for a token for each of you young gentlemen," she cried, "for you came to help father, and I would you were going to stay and wed me instead of Giles."

"What, both of us, little maid?" said Ambrose, laughing, as he stooped to receive the kiss her rosy lips tendered to him.

"Not but what she would have royal example," muttered Tibble aside.

Dennet put her head on one side, as considering. "Nay, not both; but you are gentle and courteous, and he is brave and gallant—and Giles there is moody and glum, and can do nought."

"Ah! you will see what a gallant fellow Giles can be when thou hast cured him of his home-sickness by being good to him," said Ambrose, sorry for the youth in the universal laughter at the child's plain speaking.

And thus the lads left the Dragon, amid friendly farewells. Ambrose looked up at the tall spire of St. Paul's with a strong determination that he would never put himself out of reach of such words as he had there drunk in, and which were indeed spirit and life to him.

Tibble took them down to the St. Paul's stairs on the river, where at his whistle a wherry was instantly brought to transport them to York stairs, only one of the smiths going any further in charge of the corslets. Very lovely was their voyage in the brilliant summer morning, as the glittering water reflected in broken ripples church spire, convent garden, and stately house. Here rows of elm-trees made a cool walk by the river side, there strawberry beds sloped down the Strand, and now and then the hooded figures of nuns might be seen gathering the fruit. There, rose the round church of the Temple, and the beautiful gardens surrounding the buildings, half monastic, half military, and already

inhabited by lawyers. From a barge at the Temple stairs a legal personage descended, with a square beard and open, benevolent, shrewd face, before whom Tibble removed his cap with eagerness, saying to Ambrose, "Yonder is Master More, a close friend of the dean's, a good and wise man, and forward in every good work."

Thus did they arrive at York House. Workmen were busy on some portions of it, but it was inhabited by the great Archbishop, the king's chief adviser. The approach of the boat seemed to be instantly notified, as it drew near the stone steps giving entrance to the gardens, with an avenue of trees leading up to the principal entrance.

Four or five yeomen ran down the steps, calling out to Tibble that their corslets had tarried a long time, and that Sir Thomas Drury had been storming for him to get his tilting armour into order.

Tibble followed the man who had undertaken to conduct him through a path that led to the offices of the great house, bidding the boys keep with him, and asking for their uncle Master Harry Randall.

The yeoman shook his head. He knew no such person in the household, and did not think there ever

had been such. Sir Thomas Drury was found in the stable court, trying the paces of the horse he intended to use in the approaching joust. "Ha! old Wry-mouth," he cried, "welcome at last! I must have my new device damasked on my shield. Come hither, and I'll show it thee."

Private rooms were seldom enjoyed, even by knights and gentlemen, in such a household, and Sir Thomas could only conduct Tibble to the armoury, where numerous suits of armour hung on blocks, presenting the semblance of armed men. The knight, a good-looking personage, expatiated much on the device he wished to dedicate to his lady-love, a pierced heart with a forget-me-not in the midst, and it was not until the directions were finished that Tibble ventured to mention the inquiry for Randall.

"I wot of no such fellow," returned Sir Thomas, "you had best go to the comptroller, who keeps all the names."

Tibble had to go to this functionary at any rate, to obtain an order for payment for the corslets he had brought home. Ambrose and Stephen followed him across an enormous hall, where three long tables were being laid for dinner.

The comptroller of the household, an esquire of good birth, with a stiff little ruff round his neck, sat in a sort of office inclosed by panels at the end of the hall. He made an entry of Tibble's account in a big book, and sent a message to the cofferer to bring the amount. Then Tibble again put his question on behalf of the two young foresters, and the comptroller shook his head. He did not know the name. "Was the gentleman" (he chose that word as he looked at the boys) "layman or clerk?" "Layman, certainly," said Ambrose, somewhat dismayed to find how little, on interrogation, he really knew.

"Was he a yeoman of the guard, or in attendance on one of my lord's nobles in waiting?"

"We thought he had been a yeoman," said Ambrose.

"See," said the comptroller, stimulated by a fee administered by Tibble, "'tis just dinner time, and I must go to attend on my Lord Archbishop; but do you, Tibble, sit down with these striplings to dinner, and then I will cast my eye over the books, and see if I can find any such name. What, hast not time? None ever quits my lord's without breaking his fast."

Tibble had no doubt that his master would be willing

that he should give up his time for this purpose, so he accepted the invitation. The tables were by this time nearly covered, but all stood waiting, for there flowed in from the great doorway of the hall a gorgeous train —first, a man bearing the double archiepiscopal cross of York, fashioned in silver, and thick with gems—then, with lofty mitre enriched with pearls and jewels, and with flowing violet lace-covered robes came the sturdy square-faced ruddy prelate, who was then the chief influence in England, and after him two glittering ranks of priests in square caps and richly embroidered copes, all in accordant colours. They were returning, as a yeoman told Tibble, from some great ecclesiastical ceremony, and dinner would be served instantly.

"That for which Ralf Bowyer lives!" said a voice close by. "He would fain that the dial's hands were Marie bones, the face blancmange, wherein the figures should be grapes of Corinth!"

Stephen looked round and saw a man close beside him in what he knew at once to be the garb of a jester. A tall scarlet velvet cap, with three peaks, bound with gold braid, and each surmounted with a little gilded bell, crowned his head, a small crimson

ridge to indicate the cock's comb running along the front. His jerkin and hose were of motley, the left arm and right leg being blue, their opposites, orange tawny, while the nether stocks and shoes were in like manner black and scarlet counterchanged. And yet, somehow, whether from the way of wearing it, or from the effect of the gold embroidery meandering over all, the effect was not distressing, but more like that of a gorgeous bird. The figure was tall, lithe, and active, the brown ruddy face had none of the blank stare of vacant idiocy, but was full of twinkling merriment, the black eyes laughed gaily, and perhaps only so clear-sighted and shrewd an observer as Tibble would have detected a weakness of purpose about the mouth.

There was a roar of laughter at the gibe, as indeed there was at whatever was uttered by the man whose profession was to make mirth.

"Thou likest thy food well enough thyself, quipsome one," muttered Ralf.

"Hast found one who doth not, Ralf? Then should he have a free gift of my bauble," responded the jester, shaking on high that badge, surmounted with the golden head of an ass, and jingling with bells. "How

now, friend Wrymouth? 'Tis long since thou wert here! This house hath well-nigh been forced to its ghostly weapons for lack of thy substantial ones. Where hast thou been?"

"At Salisbury, good Merryman."

"Have the Wilts men raked the moon yet out of the pond? Did they lend thee their rake, Tib, that thou hast raked up a couple of green Forest palmerworms, or be they the sons of the man in the moon, raked out and all astray?"

"Mayhap, for we met them with dog and bush," said Tibble, "and they dropped as from the moon to save my poor master from the robbers on Bagshot heath! Come now, mine honest fellow, aid me to rake, as thou sayest, this same household. They are come up from the Forest, to seek out their uncle, one Randall, who they have heard to be in this meiné. Knowest thou such a fellow?"

"To seek a spider in a stubble-field! Truly he needs my bauble who sent them on such an errand," said the jester, rather slowly, as if to take time for consideration. "What's your name, my Forest flies?"

"Birkenholt, sir," answered Ambrose, "but our uncle is Harry Randall."

"Here's fools enow to take away mine office," was the reply. "Here's a couple of lads would leave the greenwood and the free oaks and beeches, for this stinking, plague-smitten London."

"We'd not have quitted it could we have tarried at home," began Ambrose; but at that moment there was a sudden commotion, a trampling of horses was heard outside, a loud imperious voice demanded, "Is my Lord Archbishop within?" a whisper ran round, "the King," and there entered the hall with hasty steps, a figure never to be forgotten, clad in a hunting dress of green velvet embroidered with gold, with a golden hunting horn slung round his neck.

Henry VIII. was then in the splendid prime of his youth, in his twenty-seventh year, and in the eyes, not only of his own subjects, but of all others, the very type of a true king of men. Tall, and as yet of perfect form for strength, agility, and grace; his features were of the beautiful straight Plantagenet type, and his complexion of purely fair rosiness, his large well-opened blue eyes full at once of frankness and keenness, and

the short golden beard that fringed his square chin giving the manly air that otherwise might have seemed wanting to the feminine tinting of his regular lineaments. All caps were instantly doffed save the little bonnet with one drooping feather that covered his short, curled, yellow hair; and the Earl of Derby, who was at the head of Wolsey's retainers, made haste, bowing to the ground, to assure him that my Lord Archbishop was but doffing his robes, and would be with his Grace instantly. Would his Grace vouchsafe to come on to the privy chamber where the dinner was spread?

At the same moment Quipsome Hal sprang forward, exclaiming, "How now, brother and namesake? Wherefore this coil? Hath cloth of gold wearied yet of cloth of frieze? Is she willing to own her right to this?" as he held out his bauble.

"Holla, old Blister! art thou there?" said the King, good-humouredly. "What! knowest not that we are to have such a wedding as will be a sight for sore eyes!"

"Sore! that's well said, friend Hal. Thou art making progress in mine art! Sore be the eyes wherein thou wouldst throw dust."

Again the King laughed, for every one knew that his sister Mary had secretly been married to the Duke of Suffolk for the last two months, and that this public marriage and the tournament that was to follow were only for the sake of appearances. He laid his hand good-naturedly on the jester's shoulder as he walked up the hall towards the Archbishop's private apartments, but the voices of both were loud pitched, and bits of the further conversation could be picked up. "Weddings are rife in your family," said the jester, "none of you get weary of fitting on the noose. What, thou thyself, Hal? Ay, thou hast not caught the contagion yet! Now ye gods forefend! If thou hast the chance, thou'lt have it strong."

Therewith the Archbishop, in his purple robes, appeared in the archway at the other end of the hall, the King joined him, and still followed by the jester, they both vanished. It was presently made known that the King was about to dine there, and that all were to sit down to eat. The King dined alone with the Archbishop as his host; the two noblemen who had formed his suite joined the first table in the higher hall; the knights that of the steward of the household, who was

of knightly degree, and with whom the superior clergy of the household ate; and the grooms found their places among the vast array of yeomen and serving-men of all kinds with whom Tibble and his two young companions had to eat. A week ago, Stephen would have contemned the idea of being classed with serving-men and grooms, but by this time he was quite bewildered, and anxious enough to be thankful to keep near a familiar face on any terms, and to feel as if Tibble were an old friend, though he had only known him for five days.

Why the King had come had not transpired, but there was a whisper that despatches from Scotland were concerned in it. The meal was a lengthy one, but at last the King's horses were ordered, and presently Henry came forth, with his arm familiarly linked in that of the Archbishop, whose horse had likewise been made ready that he might accompany the King back to West minster. The jester was close at hand, and as a parting shaft he observed, while the King mounted his horse, "Friend Hal! give my brotherly commendations to our Madge, and tell her that one who weds Anguish cannot choose but cry out."

Wherewith, affecting to expect a stroke from the King's whip, he doubled himself up, performed the contortion now called turning a coachwheel, then, recovering himself, put his hands on his hips and danced wildly on the steps; while Henry, shaking his whip at him, laughed at the only too obvious pun, for Anguish was the English version of Angus, the title of Queen Margaret's second husband, and it was her complaints that had brought him to his counsellor.

The jester then, much to the annoyance of the two boys, thought proper to follow them to the office of the comptroller, and as that dignitary read out from his books the name of every Henry, and of all the varieties of Ralf and Randolf among the hundred and eighty persons composing the household, he kept on making comments. "Harry Hempseed, clerk to the kitchen; ay, Hempseed will serve his turn one of these days. Walter Randall, groom of the chamber; ah, ha! my lads, if you want a generous uncle who will look after you well, there is your man! He'll give you the shakings of the napery for largesse, and when he is in an open-handed mood, will let you lie on the rushes

that have served the hall. Harry of Lambeth, yeoman of the stable. He will make you free of all the taverns in Eastchepe."

And so on, accompanying each remark with a pantomime mimicry of the air and gesture of the individual. He showed in a second the contortions of Harry Weston in drawing the bow, and in another the grimaces of Henry Hope, the choir man, in producing bass notes, or the swelling majesty of Randall Porcher, the cross-bearer, till it really seemed as if he had shown off the humours of at least a third of the enormous household. Stephen had laughed at first, but as failure after failure occurred, the antics began to weary even him, and seem unkind and ridiculous as hope ebbed away, and the appalling idea began to grow on him of being cast loose on London without a friend or protector. Ambrose felt almost despairing as he heard in vain the last name. He would almost have been willing to own Hal the scullion, and his hopes rose when he heard of Hodge Randolph, the falconer, but alas, that same Hodge came from Yorkshire.

"And mine uncle was from the New Forest in Hampshire," he said.

"Maybe he went by the name of Shirley," added Stephen, "'tis where his home was."

But the comptroller, unwilling to begin a fresh search, replied at once that the only Shirley in the household was a noble esquire of the Warwickshire family.

"You must e'en come back with me, young masters," said Tibble, "and see what my master can do for you."

"Stay a bit," said the fool. "Harry of Shirley! Harry of Shirley! Methinks I could help you to the man, if so be as you will deem him worth the finding," he added, suddenly turning upside down, and looking at them standing on the palms of his hands, with an indescribable leer of drollery, which in a moment dashed all the hopes with which they had turned to him. "Should you know this nunks of yours?" he added.

"I think I should," said Ambrose. "I remember best how he used to carry me on his shoulder to cull mistletoe for Christmas."

"Ah, ha! A proper fellow of his inches now, with yellow hair?"

"Nay," said Ambrose, "I mind that his hair was

black, and his eyes as black as sloes—or as thine own, Master Jester."

The jester tumbled over into a more extraordinary attitude than before, while Stephen said—

"John was wont to twit us with being akin to Gipsy Hal."

"I mean a man sad and grave as the monks of Beaulieu," said the jester.

"He!" they both cried. "No, indeed! He was foremost in all sports." "Ah!" cried Stephen, "mind you not, Ambrose, his teaching us leap-frog, and aye leaping over one of us himself, with the other in his arms?"

"Ah! sadly changed, sadly changed," said the jester, standing upright, with a most mournful countenance. "Maybe you'd not thank me if I showed him to you, young sirs, that is, if he be the man."

"Nay! is he in need, or distress?" cried the brothers.

"Poor Hal!" returned the fool, shaking his head with mournfulness in his voice.

"Oh, take us to him, good—good jester," cried Ambrose. "We are young and strong. We will work for him."

"What, a couple of lads like you, that have come to London seeking for him to befriend you—deserving well my cap for that matter. Will ye be guided to him, broken and soured—no more gamesome, but a sickly old runagate?"

"Of course," cried Ambrose. "He is our mother's brother. We must care for him."

"Master Headley will give us work, mayhap," said Stephen, turning to Tibble. "I could clean the furnaces."

"Ah, ha! I see fools' caps must hang thick as beech masts in the Forest," cried the fool, but his voice was husky, and he turned suddenly round with his back to them, then cut three or four extraordinary capers, after which he observed—"Well, young gentlemen, I will see the man I mean, and if he be the same, and be willing to own you for his nephews, he will meet you in the Temple Gardens at six of the clock this evening, close to the rose-bush with the flowers in my livery—motley red and white."

"But how shall we know him?"

"D'ye think a pair of green caterpillars like you can't be marked—unless indeed the gardener crushes you for

blighting his roses." Wherewith the jester quitted the scene, walking on his hands, with his legs in the air.

"Is he to be trusted?" asked Tibble of the comptroller.

"Assuredly," was the answer; "none hath better wit than Quipsome Hal, when he chooseth to be in earnest. In very deed, as I have heard Sir Thomas More say, it needeth a wise man to be fool to my Lord of York."

CHAPTER VIII.

QUIPSOME HAL.

"The sweet and bitter fool
Will presently appear,
The one in motley here
The other found out there."
SHAKESPEARE.

THERE lay the quiet Temple Gardens, on the Thames bank, cut out in formal walks, with flowers growing in the beds of the homely kinds beloved by the English. Musk roses, honeysuckle and virgin's bower, climbed on the old grey walls; sops-in-wine, bluebottles, bachelor's buttons, stars of Bethlehem and the like, filled the borders; May thorns were in full sweet blossom; and near one another were the two rose bushes, one damask and one white Provence, whence Somerset and Warwick were said to have plucked their fatal badges; while on

the opposite side of a broad grass-plot was another bush, looked on as a great curiosity of the best omen, where the roses were streaked with alternate red and white, in honour, as it were, of the union of York and Lancaster.

By this rose-tree stood the two young Birkenholts. Edmund Burgess having, by his master's desire, shown them the way, and passed them in by a word and sign from his master, then retired unseen to a distance to mark what became of them, they having promised also to return and report of themselves to Master Headley.

They stood together earnestly watching for the coming of the uncle, feeling quite uncertain whether to expect a frail old broken man, or to find themselves absolutely deluded, and made game of by the jester.

The gardens were nearly empty, for most people were sitting over their supper-tables after the business of the day was over, and only one or two figures in black gowns paced up and down in conversation.

"Come away, Ambrose," said Stephen at last. "He only meant to make fools of us! Come, before he comes to gibe us for having heeded a moment. Come, I say—here's this man coming to ask us what we are doing here."

For a tall, well-made, well-dressed personage in the black or sad colour of a legal official, looking like a prosperous householder, or superior artisan, was approaching them, some attendant, as the boys concluded belonging to the Temple. They expected to be turned out, and Ambrose in an apologetic tone, began, "Sir, we were bidden to meet a—a kinsman here."

"And even so am I," was the answer, in a grave, quiet tone, "or rather to meet twain."

Ambrose looked up into a pair of dark eyes, and exclaimed "Stevie, Stevie, 'tis he. 'Tis uncle Hal."

"Ay, 'tis all you're like to have for him," answered Harry Randall, enfolding each in his embrace. "Lad, how like thou art to my poor sister! And is she indeed gone—and your honest father too—and none left at home but that hunks, little John? How and when died she?"

"Two years agone come Lammastide," answered Stephen. "There was a deadly creeping fever and ague through the Forest. We two sickened, and Ambrose was so like to die that Diggory went to the abbey for the priest to housel and anneal him, but by the time Father Simon came he was sound asleep, and soon was

whole again. But before we were on our legs, our blessed mother took the disease, and she passed away ere many days were over. Then, though poor father took not that sickness, he never was the same man again, and only twelve days after last Pasch-tide he was taken with a fit and never spake again."

Stephen was weeping by this time, and his uncle had a hand on his shoulder, and with tears in his eyes, threw in ejaculations of pity and affection. Ambrose finished the narrative with a broken voice indeed, but as one who had more self-command than his brother, perhaps than his uncle, whose exclamations became bitter and angry as he heard of the treatment the boys had experienced from their half-brother, who, as he said, he had always known as a currish mean-spirited churl, but scarce such as this.

"Nor do I think he would have been, save for his wife, Maud Pratt of Hampton," said Ambrose. "Nay, truly also, he deemed that we were only within a day's journey of council from our uncle Richard at Hyde."

"Richard Birkenholt was a sturdy old comrade! Methinks he would give Master Jack a piece of his mind."

"Alack, good uncle, we found him in his dotage, and the bursar of Hyde made quick work with us, for fear, good Father Shoveller said, that we were come to look after his corrody."

"Shoveller—what, a Shoveller of Cranbury? How fell ye in with him?"

Ambrose told the adventures of their journey, and Randall exclaimed "By my bau—I mean by my faith—if ye have ill-luck in uncles, ye have had good luck in friends."

"No ill-luck in thee, good, kind uncle," said Stephen, catching at his hand with the sense of comfort that kindred blood gives.

"How wottest thou that, child? Did not I—I mean did not Merryman tell you, that mayhap ye would not be willing to own your uncle?"

"We deemed he was but jesting," said Stephen. "Ah!"

For a sudden twinkle in the black eyes, an involuntary twist of the muscles of the face, were a sudden revelation to him. He clutched hold of Ambrose with a sudden grasp; Ambrose too looked and recoiled for a moment, while the colour spread over his face.

"Yes, lads. Can you brook the thought!—Harry Randall is the poor fool!"

Stephen, whose composure had already broken down, burst into tears again, perhaps mostly at the downfall of all his own expectations and glorifications of the kinsman about whom he had boasted. Ambrose only exclaimed "O uncle, you must have been hard pressed." For indeed the grave, almost melancholy man, who stood before them, regarding them wistfully, had little in common with the lithe tumbler full of absurdities whom they had left at York House.

"Even so, my good lad. Thou art right in that," said he gravely. "Harder than I trust will ever be the lot of you two, my sweet Moll's sons. She never guessed that I was come to this."

"O no," said Stephen. "She always thought thou —thou hadst some high preferment in——"

"And so I have," said Randall with something of his ordinary humour. "There's no man dares to speak such plain truth to my lord—or for that matter to King Harry himself, save his own Jack-a-Lee—and he, being a fool of nature's own making, cannot use his chances, poor rogue! And so the poor lads came up

to London hoping to find a gallant captain who could bring them to high preferment, and found nought but —Tom Fool! I could find it in my heart to weep for them! And so thou mindest clutching the mistletoe on nunk Hal's shoulder. I warrant it groweth still on the crooked May bush? And is old Bobbin alive?"

They answered his questions, but still as if under a great shock, and presently he said, as they paced up and down the garden walks, "Ay, I have been sore bestead, and I'll tell you how it came about, boys, and mayhap ye will pardon the poor fool, who would not own you sooner, lest ye should come in for mockery ye have not learnt to brook." There was a sadness and pleading in his tone that touched Ambrose, and he drew nearer to his uncle, who laid a hand on his shoulder, and presently the other on that of Stephen, who shrank a little at first, but submitted. "Lads, I need not tell you why I left fair Shirley and the good greenwood. I was a worse fool then than ever I have been since I wore the cap and bells, and if all had been brought home to me, it might have brought your father and mother into trouble—my sweet Moll who had done her best for me. I deemed, as you do now,

that the way to fortune was open, but I found no path before me, and I had tightened my belt many a time, and was not much more than a bag of bones, when, by chance, I fell in with a company of tumblers and gleemen. I sang them the old hunting-song, and they said I did it tunably, and, whereas they saw I could already dance a hornpipe and turn a somersault passably well, the leader of the troop, old Nat Fire-eater, took me on, and methinks he did not repent—nor I neither—save when I sprained my foot and had time to lie by and think. We had plenty to fill our bellies and put on our backs; we had welcome wherever we went, and the groats and pennies rained into our caps. I was Clown and Jack Pudding and whatever served their turn, and the very name of Quipsome Hal drew crowds. Yea, 'twas a merry life! Ay, I feel thee wince and shrink, my lad; and so should I have shuddered when I was of thine age, and hoped to come to better things."

"Methinks 'twere better than this present," said Stephen rather gruffly.

"I had my reasons, boy," said Randall, speaking as if he were pleading his cause with their father and

mother rather than with two such young lads. "There was in our company an old man-at-arms who played the lute and the rebeck, and sang ballads so long as hand and voice served him, and with him went his grandchild, a fair and honest little maiden, whom he kept so jealously apart that 'twas long ere I knew of her following the company. He had been a franklin on my Lord of Warwick's lands, and had once been burnt out by Queen Margaret's men, and just as things looked up again with him, King Edward's folk ruined all again, and slew his two sons. When great folk play the fool, small folk pay the scot, as I din into his Grace's ears whenever I may. A minion of the Duke of Clarence got the steading, and poor old Martin Fulford was turned out to shift as best he might. One son he had left, and with him he went to the Low Countries, where they would have done well had they not been bitten by faith in the fellow Perkin Warbeck. You've heard of him?"

"Yea," said Ambrose; "the same who was taken out of sanctuary at Beaulieu, and borne off to London. Father said he was marvellous like in the face to all the kings he had ever seen hunting in the Forest."

"I know not; but to the day of his death old Martin swore that he was a son of King Edward's, and they came home again with the men the Duchess of Burgundy gave Perkin—came bag and baggage, for young Fulford had wedded a fair Flemish wife, poor soul! He left her with his father nigh to Taunton ere the battle, and he was never heard of more, but as he was one of the few men who knew how to fight, belike he was slain. Thus old Martin was left with the Flemish wife and her little one on his hands, for whose sake he did what went against him sorely, joined himself to this troop of jugglers and players, so as to live by the minstrelsy he had learnt in better days, while his daughter-in-law mended and made for the company and kept them in smart and shining trim. By the time I fell in with them his voice was well-nigh gone, and his hand sorely shaking, but Fire-eating Nat, the master of our troop, was not an ill-natured fellow, and the glee-women's feet were well used to his rebeck. Moreover, the Fire-eater had an eye to little Perronel, though her mother had never let him train her—scarce let him set an eye on her; and when Mistress Fulford died, poor soul, of ague, caught when we showed off

before the merry Prior of Worcester, her last words were that Perronel should never be a glee-maiden. Well, to make an end of my tale, we had one day a mighty show at Windsor, when the King and Court were at the castle, and it was whispered to me at the end that my Lord Archbishop's household needed a jester, and that Quipsome Hal had been thought to make excellent fooling. I gave thanks at first, but said I would rather be a free man, not bound to be a greater fool than Dame Nature made me all the hours of the day. But when I got back to the Garter, what should I find but that poor old Martin had been stricken with the dead palsy while he was playing his rebeck, and would never twang a note more; and there was pretty Perronel weeping over him, and Nat Fire-eater pledging his word to give the old man bed, board, and all that he could need, if so be that Perronel should be trained to be one of his glee-maidens, to dance and tumble and sing. And there was the poor old franklin shaking his head more than the palsy made it shake already, and trying to frame his lips to say, 'rather they both should die.'"

"Oh, uncle, I wot now what thou didst!" cried Stephen.

"Yea, lad, there was nought else to be done. I asked Master Fulford to give me Perronel, plighting my word that never should she sing or dance for any one's pleasure save her own and mine, and letting him know that I came of a worthy family. We were wedded out of hand by the priest that had been sent for to housel him, and in our true names. The Fire-eater was fiery enough, and swore that, wedded or not, I was bound to him, that he would have both of us, and would not drag about a helpless old man unless he might have the wench to do his bidding. I verily believe that, but for my being on the watch and speaking a word to two or three stout yeomen of the king's guard that chanced to be crushing a pot of sack at the Garter, he would have played some villainous trick on us. They gave a hint to my Lord of York's steward, and he came down and declared that the Archbishop required Quipsome Hal, and would—of his grace—send a purse of nobles to the Fire-eater, wherewith he was to be off on the spot without more ado, or he might find it the worse for him, and they, together with mine host's good wife, took care that the rogue did not carry away Perronel with him, as he

was like to have done. To end my story, here am I, getting showers of gold coins one day and nought but kicks and gibes the next, while my good woman keeps house nigh here on the banks of the Thames with Gaffer Martin. Her Flemish thrift has set her to the washing and clear-starching of the lawyers' ruffs, whereby she makes enough to supply the defects of my scanty days, or when I have to follow my lord's grace out of her reach, sweet soul. There's my tale, nevoys. And now, have ye a hand for Quipsome Hal?"

"O uncle! Father would have honoured thee!" cried Stephen.

"Why didst thou not bring her down to the Forest?" said Ambrose.

"I conned over the thought," said Randall, "but there was no way of living. I wist not whether the Ranger might not stir up old tales, and moreover old Martin is ill to move. We brought him down by boat from Windsor, and he has never quitted the house since, nor his bed for the last two years. You'll come and see the housewife? She hath a supper laying out for you, and on the way we'll speak of what ye are to do, my poor lads."

"I'd forgotten that," said Stephen.

"So had not I," returned his uncle; "I fear me I cannot aid you to preferment as you expected. None know Quipsome Hal by any name but that of Harry Merryman, and it were not well that ye should come in there as akin to the poor fool."

"No," said Stephen, emphatically.

"Your father left you twenty crowns apiece?"

"Ay, but John hath all save four of them."

"For that there's remedy. What saidst thou of the Cheapside armourer? His fellow, the Wrymouth, seemed to have a care of you. Ye made in to the rescue with poor old Spring."

"Even so," replied Ambrose, "and if Stevie would brook the thought, I trow that Master Headley would be quite willing to have him bound as his apprentice."

"Well said, my good lad!" cried Hal. "What sayest thou, Stevie?"

"I had liefer be a man-at-arms."

"That thou couldst only be after being sorely knocked about as horseboy and as groom. I tried that once, but found it meant kicks, and oaths, and vile company —such as I would not have for thy mother's son, Steve.

Headley is a well-reported, God-fearing man, and will do well by thee. And thou wilt learn the use of arms as well as handle them."

"I like Master Headley and Kit Smallbones well enough," said Stephen, rather gloomily, "and if a gentleman must be a prentice, weapons are not so bad a craft for him."

"Whittington was a gentleman," said Ambrose.

"I am sick of Whittington," muttered Stephen.

"Nor is he the only one," said Randall; "there's Middleton and Pole—ay, and many another who have risen from the flat cap to the open helm, if not to the coronet. Nay, these London companies have rules against taking any prentice not of gentle blood. Come in to supper with my good woman, and then I'll go with thee and hold converse with good Master Headley, and if Master John doth not send the fee freely, why then I know of them who shall make him disgorge it. But mark," he added, as he led the way out of the gardens, "not a breath of Quipsome Hal. Down here they know me as a clerk of my lord's chamber, sad and sober, and high in his trust, and therein they are not far out."

In truth, though Harry Randall had been a wild and frolicsome youth in his Hampshire home, the effect of being a professional buffoon had actually made it a relaxation of effort to him to be grave, quiet, and slow in movement; and this was perhaps a more effectual disguise than the dark garments, and the false brown hair, beard, and moustache, with which he concealed the shorn and shaven condition required of the domestic jester. Having been a player, he was well able to adapt himself to his part, and yet Ambrose had considerable doubts whether Tibble had not suspected his identity from the first, more especially as both the lads had inherited the same dark eyes from their mother, and Ambrose for the first time perceived a considerable resemblance between him and Stephen, not only in feature but in unconscious gesture.

Ambrose was considering whether he had better give his uncle a hint, lest concealment should excite suspicion; when, niched as it were against an abutment of the wall of the Temple courts, close to some steps going down to the Thames, they came upon a tiny house, at whose open door stood a young woman in the snowiest of caps and aprons over a short black

gown, beneath which were a trim pair of blue hosen and stout shoes; a suspicion of yellow hair was allowed to appear framing the honest, fresh, Flemish face, which beamed a good-humoured welcome.

"Here they be! here be the poor lads, Pernel mine." She held out her hand, and offered a round comfortable cheek to each, saying, "Welcome to London, young gentlemen."

Good Mistress Perronel did not look exactly the stuff to make a glee-maiden of, nor even the beauty for whom to sacrifice everything, even liberty and respect. She was substantial in form, and broad in face and mouth, without much nose, and with large almost colourless eyes. But there was a wonderful look of heartiness and friendliness about her person and her house; the boys had never in their lives seen anything so amazingly and spotlessly clean and shining. In a corner stood an erection like a dark oaken cupboard or wardrobe, but in the middle was an opening about a yard square through which could be seen the night-capped face of a white-headed, white-bearded old man, propped against snowy pillows. To him Randall went at once, saying, "So,

gaffer, how goes it? You see I have brought company, my poor sister's sons—rest her soul!"

Gaffer Martin mumbled something to them incomprehensible, but which the jester comprehended, for he called them up and named them to him, and Martin put out a bony hand, and gave them a greeting. Though his speech and limbs had failed him, his intelligence was evidently still intact, and there was a tenderly-cared-for look about him, rendering his condition far less pitiable than that of Richard Birkenholt, who was so palpably treated as an incumbrance.

The table was already covered with a cloth, and Perronel quickly placed on it a yellow bowl of excellent beef broth, savoury with vegetables and pot-herbs, and with meat and dumplings floating in it. A lesser bowl was provided for each of the company, with horn spoons, and a loaf of good wheaten bread, and a tankard of excellent ale. Randall declared that his Perronel made far daintier dishes than my Lord Archbishop's cook, who went every day in silk and velvet.

He explained to her his views on the armourer, to

which she agreed with all her might, the old gentleman in bed adding something which the boys began to understand, that there was no worthier nor more honourable condition than that of an English burgess, specially in the good town of London, where the kings knew better than to be ever at enmity with their good towns.

"Will the armourer take both of you?" asked Mistress Randall.

"Nay, it was only for Stephen we devised it," said Ambrose.

"And what wilt thou do?"

"I wish to be a scholar," said Ambrose.

"A lean trade," quoth the jester; "a monk now or a friar may be a right jolly fellow, but I never yet saw a man who throve upon books!"

"I had rather study than thrive," said Ambrose rather dreamily.

"He wotteth not what he saith," cried Stephen.

"Oh ho! so thou art of that sort!" rejoined his uncle. "I know them! A crabbed black and white page is meat and drink to them! There's that Dutch fellow, with a long Latin name, thin and weazen as

never was Dutchman before; they say he has read all the books in the world, and can talk in all the tongues, and yet when he and Sir Thomas More and the Dean of St. Paul's get together at my lord's table one would think they were bidding for my bauble. Such excellent fooling do they make, that my lord sits holding his sides."

"The Dean of St. Paul's!" said Ambrose, experiencing a shock.

"Ay! He's another of your lean scholars, and yet he was born a wealthy man, son to a Lord Mayor, who, they say, reared him alone out of a round score of children."

"Alack! poor souls," sighed Mistress Randall under her breath, for, as Ambrose afterwards learnt, her two babes had scarce seen the light. Her husband, while giving her a look of affection, went on — "Not that he can keep his wealth. He has bestowed the most of it on Stepney church, and on the school he hath founded for poor children, nigh to St. Paul's."

"Could I get admittance to that school?" exclaimed Ambrose.

"Thou art a big fellow for a school," said his

uncle, looking him over. "However, faint heart never won fair lady."

"I have a letter from the Warden of St. Elizabeth's to one of the clerks of St. Paul's," added Ambrose. "Alworthy is his name."

"That's well. We'll prove that same," said his uncle. "Meantime, if ye have eaten your fill, we must be on our way to thine armourer, nevoy Stephen, or I shall be called for."

And after a private colloquy between the husband and wife, Ambrose was by both of them desired to make the little house his home until he could find admittance into St. Paul's School, or some other. He demurred somewhat from a mixture of feelings, in which there was a certain amount of Stephen's longing for freedom of action, and likewise a doubt whether he should not thus be a great inconvenience in the tiny household—a burden he was resolved not to be. But his uncle now took a more serious tone.

"Look thou, Ambrose, thou art my sister's son, and fool though I be, thou art bound in duty to me, and I to have charge of thee, nor will I—for the sake of thy father and mother—have thee lying I know not where,

among gulls, and cutpurses, and beguilers of youth here in this city of London. So, till better befals thee, and I wot of it, thou must be here no later than curfew, or I will know the reason why."

"And I hope the young gentleman will find it no sore grievance," said Perronel, so good-humouredly that Ambrose could only protest that he had feared to be troublesome to her, and promise to bring his bundle the next day.

CHAPTER IX.

ARMS SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL.

"For him was leifer to have at his bedde's hedde
Twenty books clothed in blacke or redde
Of Aristotle and his philosophie
Than robes riche or fiddle or psalterie."

CHAUCER.

MASTER HEADLEY was found spending the summer evening in the bay window of the hall. Tibble sat on a three-legged stool by him, writing in a crabbed hand, in a big ledger, and Kit Smallbones towered above both, holding in his hand a bundle of tally-sticks. By the help of these, and of that accuracy of memory which writing has destroyed, he was unfolding, down to the very last farthing, the entire account of payments and receipts during his master's absence, the debtor and creditor account being preserved as perfectly as if he had always had a pen in his huge

fingers, and studied book-keeping by double or single entry.

On the return of the two boys with such an apparently respectable member of society as the handsome well-dressed personage who accompanied them, little Dennet, who had been set to sew her sampler on a stool by her grandmother, under penalty of being sent off to bed if she disturbed her father, sprang up with a little cry of gladness, and running up to Ambrose, entreated for the tales of his good greenwood Forest, and the pucks and pixies, and the girl who daily shared her breakfast with a snake and said, "Eat your own side, Speckleback." Somehow, on Sunday night she had gathered that Ambrose had a store of such tales, and she dragged him off to the gallery, there to revel in them, while his brother remained with her father.

Though Master Stephen had begun by being high and mighty about mechanical crafts, and thought it a great condescension to consent to be bound apprentice, yet when once again in the Dragon court, it looked so friendly and felt so much like a home that he found himself very anxious that Master Headley should not say that he could take no more apprentices at present,

and that he should be satisfied with the terms uncle Hal would propose. And oh! suppose Tibble should recognise Quipsome Hal!

However, Tibble was at this moment entirely engrossed by the accounts, and his master left him and his big companion to unravel them, while he himself held speech with his guest at some distance—sending for a cup of sack, wherewith to enliven the conversation.

He showed himself quite satisfied with what Randall chose to tell of himself as a well known "housekeeper" close to the Temple, his wife a "lavender" there, while he himself was attached to the suite of the Archbishop of York. Here alone was there any approach to shuffling, for Master Headley was left to suppose that Randall attended Wolsey in his capacity of king's counsellor, and therefore, having a house of his own, had not been found in the roll of the domestic retainers and servants. He did not think of inquiring further, the more so as Randall was perfectly candid as to his own inferiority of birth to the Birkenholt family, and the circumstances under which he had left the Forest.

Master Headley professed to be quite willing to accept Stephen as an apprentice, with or without a fee;

but he agreed with Randall that it would be much better not to expose him to having it cast in his teeth that he was accepted out of charity; and Randall undertook to get a letter so written and conveyed to John Birkenholt that he should not dare to withhold the needful sum, in earnest of which Master Headley would accept the two crowns that Stephen had in hand, as soon as the indentures could be drawn out by one of the many scriveners who lived about St. Paul's.

This settled, Randall could stay no longer, but he called both nephews into the court with him. "Ye can write a letter?" he said.

"Ay, sure, both of us; but Ambrose is the best scribe," said Stephen.

"One of you had best write then. Let that cur John know that I have my Lord of York's ear, and there will be no fear but he will give it. I'll find a safe hand among the clerks, when the judges ride to hold the assize. Mayhap Ambrose might also write to the Father at Beaulieu. The thing had best be bruited."

"I wished to do so," said Ambrose. "It irked me to have taken no leave of the good Fathers."

Randall then took his leave, having little more than

time to return to York House, where the Archbishop might perchance come home wearied and chafed from the King, and the jester might be missed if not there to put him in good humour.

The curfew sounded, and though attention to its notes was not compulsory by law, it was regarded as the break-up of the evening and the note of recall in all well-ordered establishments. The apprentices and journeymen came into the court, among them Giles Headley, who had been taken out by one of the men to be provided with a working dress, much to his disgust; the grandmother summoned little Dennet and carried her off to bed. Stephen and Ambrose bade good-night, but Master Headley and his two confidential men remained somewhat longer to wind up their accounts. Doors were not, as a rule, locked within the court, for though it contained from forty to fifty persons, they were all regarded as a single family, and it was enough to fasten the heavily bolted, iron-studded folding doors of the great gateway leading into Cheapside, the key being brought to the master like that of a castle, seven minutes, measured by the glass, after the last note of the curfew in the belfry outside St. Paul's.

The summer twilight, however, lasted long after this time of grace, and when Tibble had completed his accountant's work, and Smallbones' deep voiced "Good-night, comrade," had resounded over the court, he beheld a figure rise up from the steps of the gallery, and Ambrose's voice said: "May I speak to thee, Tibble? I need thy counsel."

"Come hither, sir," said the foreman, muttering to himself, "Methought 'twas working in him! The leaven! the leaven!"

Tibble led the way up one of the side stairs into the open gallery, where he presently opened a door, admitting to a small, though high chamber, the walls of bare brick, and containing a low bed, a small table, a three-legged stool, a big chest, and two cupboards, also a cross over the head of the bed. A private room was a luxury neither possessed nor desired by most persons of any degree, and only enjoyed by Tibble in consideration of his great value to his master, his peculiar tastes, and the injuries he had received. In point of fact, his fall had been owing to a hasty blow, given in a passion by the master himself when a young man. Dismay and repentance had made Giles Headley a cooler and more

self-controlled man ever since, and even if Tibble had not been a superior workman, he might still have been free to do almost anything he chose. Tibble gave his visitor the stool, and himself sat down on the chest, saying: "So you have found your uncle, sir."

"Ay," said Ambrose, pausing in some expectation that Tibble would mention some suspicion of his identity; but if the foreman had his ideas on the subject he did not disclose them, and waited for more communications.

"Tibble!" said Ambrose, with a long gasp, "I must find means to hear more of him thou tookedst me to on Sunday."

"None ever truly tasted of that well without longing to come back to it," quoth Tibble. "But hath not thy kinsman done aught for thee?"

"Nay," said Ambrose, "save to offer me a lodging with his wife, a good and kindly lavender at the Temple."

Tibble nodded.

"So far am I free," said Ambrose, "and I am glad of it. I have a letter here to one of the canons, one Master Alworthy, but ere I seek him I would

know somewhat from thee, Tibble. What like is he?"

"I cannot tell, sir," said Tibble. "The canons are rich and many, and a poor smith like me wots little of their fashions.

"Is it true," again asked Ambrose, "that the Dean —he who spake those words yesterday—hath a school here for young boys?"

"Ay. And a good and mild school it be, bringing them up in the name and nurture of the Holy Child Jesus, to whom it is dedicated."

"Then they are taught this same doctrine?"

"I trow they be. They say the Dean loves them like the children of his old age, and declares that they shall be made in love with holy lore by gentleness rather than severity."

"Is it likely that this same Alworthy could obtain me entrance there?"

"Alack, sir, I fear me thou art too old. I see none but little lads among them. Didst thou come to London with that intent?"

"Nay, for I only wist to-day that there was such a school. I came with I scarce know what purpose, save

to see Stephen safely bestowed, and then to find some way of learning myself. Moreover, a change seems to have come on me, as though I had hitherto been walking in a dream."

Tibble nodded, and Ambrose, sitting there in the dark, was moved to pour forth all his heart, the experience of many an ardent soul in those spirit searching days. Growing up happily under the care of the simple monks of Beaulieu he had never looked beyond their somewhat mechanical routine, accepted everything implicitly, and gone on acquiring knowledge with the receptive spirit but dormant thought of studious boyhood as yet unawakened, thinking that the studious clerical life to which every one destined him would only be a continuation of the same, as indeed it had been to his master, Father Simon. Not that Ambrose expressed this, beyond saying, "They are good and holy men, and I thought all were like them, and fear that was all!"

Then came death, for the first time nearly touching and affecting the youth, and making his soul yearn after further depths, which he might yet have found in the peace of the good old men, and the holy rites and doctrine that they preserved; but before there was

time for these things to find their way into the wounds of his spirit, his expulsion from home had sent him forth to see another side of monkish and clerkly life.

Father Shoveller, kindly as he was, was a mere yeoman with nothing spiritual about him; the monks of Hyde were, the younger, gay comrades, only trying how loosely they could sit to their vows; the elder, churlish and avaricious; even the Warden of Elizabeth College was little more than a student. And in London, fresh phases had revealed themselves; the pomp, state, splendour and luxury of Archbishop Wolsey's house had been a shock to the lad's ideal of a bishop drawn from the saintly biographies he had studied at Beaulieu; and he had but to keep his ears open to hear endless scandals about the mass priests, as they were called, since they were at this time very unpopular in London, and in many cases deservedly so. Everything that the boy had hitherto thought the way of holiness and salvation seemed invaded by evil and danger, and under the bondage of death, whose terrible dance continued to haunt him.

"I saw it, I saw it," he said, "all over those halls at

York House. I seemed to behold the grisly shape standing behind one and another, as they ate and laughed; and when the Archbishop and his priests and the King came in it seemed only to make the pageant complete! Only now and then could I recall those blessed words, 'Ye are free indeed.' Did he say from the bondage of death?"

"Yea," said Tibble, "into the glorious freedom of God's children."

"Thou knowst it. Thou knowst it, Tibble. It seems to me that life is no life, but living death, without that freedom! And I *must* hear of it, and know whether it is mine, yea, and Stephen's, and all whom I love. O Tibble, I would beg my bread rather than not have that freedom ever before mine eyes."

"Hold it fast! hold it fast, dear sir," said Tibble, holding out his hands with tears in his eyes, and his face working in a manner that happily Ambrose could not see.

"But how—how? The barefoot friar said that for an *Ave* a day, our Blessed Lady will drag us back from purgatory. I saw her on the wall of her chapel at Winchester saving a robber knight from the sea, yea

and a thief from the gallows; but that is not being free."

"Fond inventions of pardon-mongers," muttered Tibble.

"And is one not free when the priest hath assoilsied him?" added Ambrose.

"If, and if—" said Tibble. "But none shall make me trow that shrift in words, without heart-sorrow for sin, and the Latin heard with no thought of Him that bore the guilt, can set the sinner free. 'Tis none other that the Dean sets forth, ay, and the book that I have here. I thank my God," he stood up and took off his cap reverently, "that He hath opened the eyes of another!"

His tone was such that Ambrose could have believed him some devout almost inspired hermit rather than the acute skilful artisan he appeared at other times; and in fact, Tibble Steelman, like many another craftsman of those days, led a double life, the outer one that of the ordinary workman, the inner one devoted to those lights that were shining unveiled and new to many; and especially here in the heart of the City, partly from the influence of Dean Colet's sermons and catechisings at

St. Paul's, but also from remnants of Lollardism, which had never been entirely quenched. The ordinary clergy looked at it with horror, but the intelligent and thoughtful of the burgher and craftsman classes studied it with a passionate fervour which might have sooner broken out and in more perilous forms save for the guidance it received in the truly Catholic and open-spirited public teachings of Colet, in which he persisted in spite of the opposition of his brother clergy.

Not that as yet the inquirers had in the slightest degree broken with the system of the Church, or with her old traditions. They were only beginning to see the light that had been veiled from them, and to endeavour to clear the fountain from the mire that had fouled it; and there was as yet no reason to believe that the aspersions continually made against the mass priests and the friars were more than the chronic grumblings of Englishmen, who had found the same faults in them for the last two hundred years.

"And what wouldst thou do, young sir?" presently inquired Tibble.

"That I came to ask thee, good Tibble. I would work to the best of my power in any craft so I may

hear those words and gain the key to all I have hitherto learnt, unheeding as one in a dream. My purpose had been to be a scholar and a clerk, but I must see mine own way, and know whither I am being carried, ere I can go farther."

Tibble writhed and wriggled himself about in consideration. "I would I wist how to take thee to the Dean himself," he said, "but I am but a poor man, and his doctrine is 'new wine in old bottles' to the master, though he be a right good man after his lights. See now, Master Ambrose, me seemeth that thou hadst best take thy letter first to this same priest. It may be that he can prefer thee to some post about the minster. Canst sing?"

"I could once, but my voice is nought at this present. If I could but be a servitor at St. Paul's School!"

"It might be that the will which hath led thee so far hath that post in store for thee, so bear the letter to Master Alworthy. And if he fail thee, wouldst thou think scorn of aiding a friend of mine who worketh a printing-press in Warwick Inner Yard? Thou wilt find him at his place in Paternoster Row, hard by St. Paul's. He needeth one who is clerk enough to read

the Latin, and the craft being a new one 'tis fenced by none of those prentice laws that would bar the way to thee elsewhere, at thy years."

"I should dwell among books!"

"Yea, and holy books, that bear on the one matter dear to the true heart. Thou might serve Lucas Hansen at the sign of the Winged Staff till thou hast settled thine heart, and then it may be the way would be opened to study at Oxford or at Cambridge, so that thou couldst expound the faith to others."

"Good Tibble, kind Tibble, I knew thou couldst aid me! Wilt thou speak to this Master Hansen for me?"

Tibble, however, held that it was more seemly that Ambrose should first try his fate with Master Alworthy, but in case of this not succeeding, he promised to write a billet that would secure attention from Lucas Hansen.

"I warn thee, however, that he is Low Dutch," he added, "though he speaketh English well." He would gladly have gone with the youth, and at any other time might have been sent by his master, but the whole energies of the Dragon would be taken up for the next week by preparations for the tilting-match at court, and Tibble could not be spared for another working hour.

Ambrose, as he rose to bid his friend good-night, could not help saying that he marvelled that one such as he could turn his mind to such vanities as the tilt-yard required.

"Nay," said Tibble, "'twas the craft I was bred to—yea, and I have a good master; and the Apostle Paul himself—as I've heard a preacher say—bade men continue in the state wherein they were, and not be curious to chop and change. Who knoweth whether in God's sight, all our wars and policies be no more than the games of the tilt-yard. Moreover, Paul himself made these very weapons read as good a sermon as the Dean himself. Didst never hear of the shield of faith, and helmet of salvation, and breastplate of righteousness? So, if thou comest to Master Hansen, and provest worthy of his trust, thou wilt hear more, ay, and maybe read too thyself, and send forth the good seed to others," he murmured to himself, as he guided his visitor across the moonlit court up the stairs to the chamber where Stephen lay fast asleep.

CHAPTER X.

TWO VOCATIONS.

"The smith, a mighty man is he
With large and sinewy hands;
And the muscles of his brawny arms
Are strong as iron bands."

LONGFELLOW.

STEPHEN'S first thought in the morning was whether the *ex voto* effigy of poor Spring was put in hand, while Ambrose thought of Tibble's promised commendation to the printer. They both, however, found their affairs must needs wait. Orders for weapons for the tilting-match had come in so thickly the day before that every hand must be employed on executing them, and the Dragon court was ringing again with the clang of hammers and screech of grind-stones.

Stephen, though not yet formally bound, was to enter on his apprentice life at once; and Ambrose was

assured by Master Headley that it was of no use to repair to any of the dignified clergy of St. Paul's before mid-day, and that he had better employ the time in writing to his elder brother respecting the fee. Materials were supplied to him, and he used them so as to do credit to the monks of Beaulieu, in spite of little Dennet spending every spare moment in watching his pen as if he were performing some cabalistic operation.

He was a long time about it. There were two letters to write, and the wording of them needed to be very careful, besides that the old court hand took more time to frame than the Italian current hand, and even thus, when dinner-time came, at ten o'clock, the household was astonished to find that he had finished all that regarded Stephen, though he had left the letters open, until his own venture should have been made.

Stephen flung himself down beside his brother hot and panting, shaking his shoulder-blades and declaring that his arms felt ready to drop out. He had been turning a grindstone ever since six o'clock. The two new apprentices had been set on to sharpening the weapon points as all that they were capable of, and had been bidden by Smallbones to turn and hold alternately,

but "that oaf Giles Headley," said Stephen, "never ground but one lance, and made me go on turning, threatening to lay the butt about mine ears if I slacked."

"The lazy lubber!" cried Ambrose. "But did none see thee, or couldst not call out for redress?"

"Thou art half a wench thyself, Ambrose, to think I'd complain. Besides, he stood on his rights as a master, and he is a big fellow."

"That's true," said Ambrose, "and he might make it the worse for thee."

"I would I were as big as he," sighed Stephen, "I would soon show him which was the better man."

Perhaps the grinding match had not been as unobserved as Stephen fancied, for on returning to work, Smallbones, who presided over all the rougher parts of the business, claimed them both. He set Stephen to stand by him, sort out and hand him all the rivets needed for a suit of proof armour that hung on a frame, while he required Giles to straighten bars of iron heated to a white heat. Ere long Giles called out for Stephen to change places, to which Smallbones coolly replied, "Turnabout is the rule here, master."

"Even so," replied Giles, "and I have been at work like this long enough, ay, and too long!"

"Thy turn was a matter of three hours this morning," replied Kit—not coolly, for nobody was cool in his den, but with a brevity which provoked a laugh.

"I shall see what my cousin the master saith!" cried Giles, in great wrath.

"Ay, that thou wilt," returned Kit, "if thou dost loiter over thy business, and hast not those bars ready when called for."

"He never meant me to be put on work like this, with a hammer that breaks mine arm."

"What! crying out for *that!*" said Edmund Burgess, who had just come in to ask for a pair of tongs. "What wouldst say to the big hammer that none can wield save Kit himself?"

Giles felt there was no redress, and panted on, feeling as if he were melting away, and with a dumb, wild rage in his heart, that could get no outlet, for Smallbones was at least as much bigger than he as he was than Stephen. Tibble was meanwhile busy over the gilding and enamelling of Buckingham's magnificent plate armour in Italian fashion, but he had found time to

thrust into Ambrose's hand an exceedingly small and curiously folded billet for Lucas Hansen, the printer, in case of need. "He would be found at the sign of the Winged Staff, in Paternoster Row," said Tibble, "or if not there himself, there would be his servant who would direct Ambrose to the place where the Dutch printer lived and worked." No one was at leisure to show the lad the way, and he set out with a strange feeling of solitude, as his path began decisively to be away from that of his brother.

He did not find much difficulty in discovering the quadrangle on the south side of the minster where the minor canons lived near the deanery; and the porter, a stout lay brother, pointed out to him the doorway belonging to Master Alworthy. He knocked, and a young man with a tonsured head but a bloated face opened it. Ambrose explained that he had brought a letter from the Warden of St. Elizabeth's College at Winchester.

"Give it here," said the young man.

"I would give it to his reverence himself," said Ambrose.

"His reverence is taking his after-dinner nap and may not be disturbed," said the man.

"Then I will wait," said Ambrose.

The door was shut in his face, but it was the shady side of the court, and he sat down on a bench and waited. After full an hour the door was opened, and the canon, a good-natured looking man, in a square cap, and gown and cassock of the finest cloth, came slowly out. He had evidently heard nothing of the message, and was taken by surprise when Ambrose, doffing his cap and bowing low, gave him the greeting of the Warden of St. Elizabeth's and the letter.

"Hum! Ha! My good friend—Fielder—I remember him. He was always a scholar. So he hath sent thee here with his commendations. What should I do with all the idle country lads that come up to choke London and feed the plague? Yet stay—that lurdane Bolt is getting intolerably lazy and insolent, and methinks he robs me! What canst do, thou stripling?"

"I can read Latin, sir, and know the Greek alphabeta."

"Tush! I want no scholar more than enough to serve my mass. Canst sing?"

"Not now; but I hope to do so again."

"When I rid me of Bolt there—and there's an office

under the sacristan that he might fill as well as another knave—the fellow might do for me well enow as a body servant," said Mr. Alworthy, speaking to himself. "He would brush my gowns and make my bed, and I might perchance trust him with my marketings, and by and by there might be some office for him when he grew saucy and idle. I'll prove him on mine old comrade's word."

"Sir," said Ambrose, respectfully, "what I seek for is occasion for study. I had hoped you could speak to the Dean, Dr. John Colet, for some post at his school."

"Boy," said Alworthy, "I thought thee no such fool! Why crack thy brains with study when I can show thee a surer path to ease and preferment? But I see thou art too proud to do an old man a service. Thou writst thyself gentleman, forsooth, and high blood will not stoop."

"Not so, sir," returned Ambrose, "I would work in any way so I could study the humanities, and hear the Dean preach. Cannot you commend me to his school?"

"Ha!" exclaimed the canon, "this is your sort, is it? I'll have nought to do with it! Preaching, preaching! Every idle child's head is agog on preaching

nowadays! A plague on it! Why can't Master Dean leave it to the black friars, whose vocation 'tis, and not cumber us with his sermons for ever, and set every lazy lad thinking he must needs run after them? No, no, my good boy, take my advice. Thou shalt have two good bellyfuls a day, all my cast gowns, and a pair of shoes by the year, with a groat a month if thou wilt keep mine house, bring in my meals, and the like, and by and by, so thou art a good lad, and runst not after these new-fangled preachments which lead but to heresy, and set folk racking their brains about sin and such trash, we'll get thee shorn and into minor orders, and who knows what good preferment thou mayst not win in due time!"

"Sir, I am beholden to you, but my mind is set on study."

"What kin art thou to a fool?" cried the minor canon, so startling Ambrose that he had almost answered, and turning to another ecclesiastic whose siesta seemed to have ended about the same time, "Look at this varlet, Brother Cloudesley! Would you believe it? He comes to me with a letter from mine old friend, in consideration of which I offer him that saucy

lubber Bolt's place, a gown of mine own a year, meat and preferment, and, lo you, he tells me all he wants is to study Greek, forsooth, and hear the Dean's sermons!"

The other canon shook his head in dismay at such arrant folly. "Young stripling, be warned," he said. "Know what is good for thee. Greek is the tongue of heresy."

"How may that be, reverend sir," said Ambrose, "when the holy Apostles and the Fathers spake and wrote in the Greek?"

"Waste not thy time on him, brother," said Mr. Alworthy. "He will find out his error when his pride and his Greek forsooth have brought him to fire and faggot."

"Ay! ay!" added Cloudesley. "The Dean with his Dutch friend and his sermons, and his new grammar and accidence, is sowing heretics as thick as groundsel."

Wherewith the two canons of the old school waddled away, arm in arm, and Bolt put out his head, leered at Ambrose, and bade him shog off, and not come sneaking after other folk's shoes.

Sooth to say, Ambrose was relieved by his rejection. If he were not to obtain admission in any capacity to St. Paul's School, he felt more drawn to Tibble's friend the printer; for the self-seeking luxurious habits into which so many of the beneficed clergy had fallen were repulsive to him, and his whole soul thirsted after that new revelation, as it were, which Colet's sermon had made to him. Yet the word heresy was terrible and confusing, and a doubt came over him whether he might not be forsaking the right path, and be lured aside by false lights.

He would think it out before he committed himself. Where should he do so in peace? He thought of the great Minster, but the nave was full of a surging multitude, and there was a loud hum of voices proceeding from it, which took from him all inclination to find his way to the quieter and inner portions of the sanctury.

Then he recollected the little Pardon Church, where he had seen the *Dance of Death* on the walls; and crossing the burial-ground he entered, and, as he expected, found it empty, since the hours for masses for the dead were now past. He knelt down on a step, repeated the sext office, in warning for which the bells

were chiming all round, covering his face with his hands, and thinking himself back to Beaulieu; then, seating himself on a step, leaning against the wall, he tried to think out whether to give himself up to the leadings of the new light that had broken on him, or whether to wrench himself from it. Was this, which seemed to him truth and deliverance, verily the heresy respecting which rumours had come to horrify the country convents? If he had only heard of it from Tibble Wrymouth, he would have doubted, in spite of its power over him, but he had heard it from a man, wise, good, and high in place, like Dean Colet. Yet to his further perplexity, his uncle had spoken of Colet as jesting at Wolsey's table. What course should he take? Could he bear to turn away from that which drew his soul so powerfully, and return to the bounds which seem to him to be grown so narrow, but which he was told were safe? Now that Stephen was settled, it was open to him to return to St. Elizabeth's College, but the young soul within him revolted against the repetition of what had become to him unsatisfying, unless illumined by the brightness he seemed to have glimpsed at.

But Ambrose had gone through much unwonted fatigue of late, and while thus musing he fell asleep, with his head against the wall. He was half wakened by the sound of voices, and presently became aware that two persons were examining the walls, and comparing the paintings with some others, which one of them had evidently seen. If he had known it, it was with the *Dance of Death* on the bridge of Lucerne.

"I question," said a voice that Ambrose had heard before, "whether these terrors be wholesome for men's souls."

"For priests' pouches, they be," said the other, with something of a foreign accent.

"Alack, when shall we see the day when the hope of paradise and dread of purgatory shall be no longer made the tools of priestly gain; and hatred of sin taught to these poor folk, instead of servile dread of punishment."

"Have a care, my Colet," answered the yellow bearded foreigner; "thou art already in ill odour with those same men in authority; and though a Dean's stall be fenced from the episcopal crook, yet there is a rod at Rome which can reach even thither."

"I tell thee, dear Erasmus, thou art too timid; I were well content to leave house and goods, yea, to go to prison or to death, could I but bring home to one soul, for which Christ died, the truth and hope in every one of those prayers and creeds that our poor folk are taught to patter as a senseless charm."

"These are strange times," returned Erasmus. "Methinks yonder phantom, be he skeleton or angel, will have snatched both of us away ere we behold the full issue either of thy preachings, or my Greek Testament, or of our More's Utopian images. Dost thou not feel as though we were like children who have set some mighty engine in motion, like the great water-wheels in my native home, which, whirled by the flowing streams of time and opinion, may break up the whole foundations, and destroy the oneness of the edifice?"

"It may be so," returned Colet. "What read we? 'The net brake' even in the Master's sight, while still afloat on the sea. It was only on the shore that the hundred and fifty-three, all good and sound, were drawn to His feet."

"And," returned Erasmus, "I see wherefore thou

hast made thy children at St. Paul's one hundred and fifty and three."

The two friends were passing out. Their latter speeches had scarce been understood by Ambrose, even if he heard them, so full was he of conflicting feelings, now ready to cast himself before their feet, and entreat the Dean to help him to guidance, now withheld by bashfulness, unwillingness to interrupt, and ingenuous shame at appearing like an eavesdropper towards such dignified and venerable personages. Had he obeyed his first impulse, mayhap his career had been made safer and easier for him, but it was while shyness chained his limbs and tongue that the Dean and Erasmus quitted the chapel, and the opportunity of accosting them had slipped away.

Their half comprehended words had however decided him in the part he should take, making him sure that Colet was not controverting the formularies of the Church, but drawing out those meanings which in repetition by rote were well-nigh forgotten. It was as if his course were made clear to him.

He was determined to take the means which most readily presented themselves of hearing Colet; and

leaving the chapel, he bent his steps to the Row which his book-loving eye had already marked. Flanking the great Cathedral on the north, was the row of small open stalls devoted to the sale of books, or "objects of devotion," all so arranged that the open portion might be cleared, and the stock-in-trade locked up if not carried away. Each stall had its own sign, most of them sacred, such as the Lamb and Flag, the Scallop Shell, or some patron saint, but classical emblems were oddly intermixed, such as Minerva's Ægis, Pegasus, and the Lyre of Apollo. The sellers, some middle-aged men, some lads, stretched out their arms with their wares to attract the passengers in the street, and did not fail to beset Ambrose. The more lively looked at his Lincoln green and shouted verses of ballads at him, fluttering broad sheets with verses on the lamentable fate of Jane Shore, or Fair Rosamond, the same woodcut doing duty for both ladies, without mercy to their beauty. The scholastic judged by his face and step that he was a student, and they flourished at him black-bound copies of Virgilius Maro, and of Tully's Offices, while others, hoping that he was an incipient clerk, offered breviaries, missals or portuaries, with the

Use of St. Paul's, or of Sarum, or mayhap St. Austin's Confessions. He made his way along, with his eye diligently heedful of the signs, and at last recognised the Winged Staff, or caduceus of Hermes, over a stall where a couple of boys in blue caps and gowns and yellow stockings were making a purchase of a small, grave-looking, elderly but bright cheeked man, whose yellow hair and beard were getting intermingled with grey. They were evidently those St. Paul's School boys whom Ambrose envied so much, and as they finished their bargaining and ran away together, Ambrose advanced with a salutation, asked if he did not see Master Lucas Hansen, and gave him the note with the commendations of Tibble Steelman the armourer.

He was answered with a ready nod and "yea, yea," as the old man opened the billet and cast his eyes over it; then scanning Ambrose from head to foot, said with some amazement, "But you are of gentle blood, young sir."

"I am," said Ambrose; "but gentle blood needs at times to work for bread, and Tibble let me hope that I might find both livelihood for the body and for the soul with you, sir."

"Is it so?" asked the printer, his face lighting up. "Art thou willing to labour and toil, and give up hope of fee and honour, if so thou mayst win the truth?"

Ambrose folded his hands with a gesture of earnestness, and Lucas Hansen said, "Bless thee, my son! Methinks I can aid thee in thy quest, so thou canst lay aside," and here his voice grew sharper and more peremptory, "all thy gentleman's airs and follies, and serve—ay, serve and obey."

"I trust so," returned Ambrose; "my brother is even now becoming prentice to Master Giles Headley, and we hope to live as honest men by the work of our hands and brains."

"I forgot that you English herren are not so puffed up with pride and scorn like our Dutch nobles," returned the printer. "Canst live sparingly, and lie hard, and see that thou keepst the house clean, not like these English swine?"

"I hope so," said Ambrose, smiling; "but I have an uncle and aunt, and they would have me lie every night at their house beside the Temple gardens."

"What is thine uncle?"

"He hath a post in the meiné of my Lord Archbishop of York," said Ambrose, blushing and hesitating a little. "He cometh to and fro to his wife, who dwells with her old father, doing fine lavender's work for the lawyer folk therein."

It was somewhat galling that this should be the most respectable occupation that could be put forward, but Lucas Hansen was evidently reassured by it. He next asked whether Ambrose could read Latin, putting a book into his hand as he did so; Ambrose read and construed readily, explaining that he had been trained at Beaulieu.

"That is well!" said the printer; "and hast thou any Greek?".

"Only the alphabeta," said Ambrose, "I made that out from a book at Beaulieu, but Father Simon knew no more, and there was nought to study from."

"Even so," replied Hansen, "but little as thou knowst 'tis as much as I can hope for from any who will aid me in my craft. 'Tis I that, as thou hast seen, furnish for the use of the children at the Dean's school of St. Paul's. The best and foremost scholars of them are grounded in their Greek, that being the tongue wherein the Holy

Gospels were first writ. Hitherto I have had to get me books for their use from Holland, whither they are brought from Basle, but I have had sent me from Hamburg a fount of type of the Greek character, whereby I hope to print at home, the accidence, and mayhap the *Dialogues* of Plato, and it might even be the sacred Gospel itself, which the great Doctor, Master Erasmus, is even now collating from the best authorities in the universities."

Ambrose's eyes kindled with unmistakable delight. "You have the accidence!" he exclaimed. "Then could I study the tongue even while working for you! Sir, I would do my best! It is the very opportunity I seek."

"Fair and softly," said the printer with something of a smile. "Thou art new to cheapening and bargaining, my fair lad. Thou hast spoken not one word of the wage."

"I recked not of that," said Ambrose. "'Tis true, I may not burthen mine uncle and aunt, but verily, sir, I would live on the humblest fare that will keep body and soul together so that I may have such an opportunity."

"How knowst thou what the opportunity may be?" returned Lucas, drily. "Thou art but a babe! Some one should have a care of thee. If I set thee to stand here all day and cry what d'ye lack? or to carry bales of books twixt this and Warwick Inner Yard, thou wouldst have no ground to complain."

"Nay, sir," returned Ambrose, "I wot that Tibble Steelman would never send me to one who would not truly give me what I need."

"Tibble Steelman is verily one of the few who are both called and chosen," replied Lucas, "and I think thou art the same so far as green youth may be judged, since thou art one who will follow the word into the desert, and never ask for the loaves and fishes. Nevertheless, I will take none advantage of thy youth and zeal, but thou shalt first behold what thou shalt have to do for me, and then if it still likes thee, I will see thy kindred. Hast no father?"

Ambrose explained, and at that moment Master Hansen's boy made his appearance, returning from an errand; the stall was left in his charge, while the master took Ambrose with him into the precincts of what had once been the splendid and hospitable mansion

of the great king-maker, Warwick, but was now broken up into endless little tenements with their courts and streets, though the baronial ornaments and the arrangement still showed what the place had been.

Entering beneath a wide archway, still bearing the sign of the Bear and Ragged Staff, Lucas led the way into what must have been one of the courts of offices, for it was surrounded with buildings and sheds of different heights and sizes, and had on one side a deep trough of stone, fed by a series of water-taps, intended for the use of the stables. The doors of one of these buildings was unlocked by Master Hansen, and Ambrose found himself in what had once perhaps been part of a stable, but had been partitioned off from the rest. There were two stalls, one serving the Dutchman for his living room, the other for his workshop. In one corner stood a white earthenware stove —so new a spectacle to the young forester that he supposed it to be the printing press. A table, shiny with rubbing, a wooden chair, a couple of stools, a few vessels, mirrors for brightness, some chests and corner cupboards, a bed shutting up like a box and likewise highly polished, completed the furniture, all arranged

with the marvellous orderliness and neatness of the nation. A curtain shut off the opening to the other stall, where stood a machine with a huge screw, turned by leverage. Boxes of type and piles of paper surrounded it, and Ambrose stood and looked at it with a sort of awe-struck wonder and respect as the great fount of wisdom. Hansen showed him what his work would be, in setting up type, and by and by correcting after the first proof. The machine could only print four pages at a time, and for this operation the whole strength of the establishment was required. Moreover, Master Hansen bound, as well as printed his books. Ambrose was by no means daunted. As long as he might read as well as print, and while he had Sundays at St. Paul's to look to, he asked no more—except indeed that his gentle blood stirred at the notion of acting salesman in the book-stall, and Master Hansen assured him with a smile that Will Wherry, the other boy, would do that better than either of them, and that he would be entirely employed here.

The methodical master insisted however on making terms with the boy's relations; and with some

misgivings on Ambrose's part, the two—since business hours were almost over—walked together to the Temple and to the little house, where Perronel was ironing under her window.

Ambrose need not have doubted. The Dutch blood on either side was stirred; and the good housewife commanded the little printer's respect as he looked round on a kitchen as tidy as if it were in his own country. And the bargain was struck that Ambrose Birkenholt should serve Master Hansen for his meals and two pence a week, while he was to sleep at the little house of Mistress Randall, who would keep his clothes and linen in order.

And thus it was that both Ambrose and Stephen Birkenholt had found their vocations for the present, and both were fervent in them. Master Headley pshawed a little when he heard that Ambrose had engaged himself to a printer and a foreigner; and when he was told it was to a friend of Tibble's, only shook his head, saying that Tib's only fault was dabbling in matters of divinity, as if a plain man could not be saved without them! However, he respected the lad for having known his own mind and not hung about

in idleness, and he had no opinion of clerks, whether monks or priests. Indeed, the low esteem in which the clergy as a class were held in London was one of the very evil signs of the times. Ambrose was invited to dine and sup at the Dragon court every Sunday and holiday, and he was glad to accept, since the hospitality was so free, and he thus was able to see his brother and Tibble; besides that, it prevented him from burthening Mistress Randall, whom he really liked, though he could not see her husband, either in his motley or his plain garments, without a shudder of repulsion.

Ambrose found that setting up type had not much more to do with the study of new books than Stephen's turning the grindstone had with fighting in the lists; and the mistakes he made in spelling from right to left, and in confounding the letters, made him despair, and prepare for any amount of just indignation from his master; but he found on the contrary that Master Hansen had never had a pupil who made so few blunders on the first trial, and augured well of him from such a beginning. Paper was too costly, and pressure too difficult, for many proofs to be struck off,

but Hansen could read and correct his type as it stood, and assured Ambrose that practice would soon give him the same power; and the correction was thus completed, when Will Wherry, a big, stout fellow, came in to dinner—the stall being left during that time, as nobody came for books during the dinner-hour, and Hansen, having an understanding with his next neighbour, by which they took turns to keep guard against thieves.

The master and the two lads dined together on the contents of a cauldron, where pease and pork had been simmering together on the stove all the morning. Their strength was then united to work the press and strike off a sheet, which the master scanned, finding only one error in it. It was a portion of Lilly's *Grammar*, and Ambrose regarded it with mingled pride and delight, though he longed to go further into those deeper revelations for the sake of which he had come here.

Master Hansen then left the youths to strike off a couple of hundred sheets, after which they were to wash the types and re-arrange the letters in the compartments in order, whilst he returned to the stall. The

customers requiring his personal attention were generally late ones. When all this was accomplished, and the pot put on again in preparation for supper, the lads might use the short time that remained as they would, and Hansen himself showed Ambrose a shelf of books concealed by a blue curtain, whence he might read.

Will Wherry showed unconcealed amazement that this should be the taste of his companion. He himself hated the whole business, and would never have adopted it, but that he had too many brothers for all to take to the water on the Thames, and their mother was too poor to apprentice them, and needed the small weekly pay the Dutchman gave him. He seemed a good-natured, dull fellow, whom no doubt Hansen had hired for the sake of the strong arms, developed by generations of oarsmen upon the river. What he specially disliked was that his master was a foreigner. The whole court swarmed with foreigners, he said, with the utmost disgust, as if they were noxious insects. They made provisions dear, and undersold honest men, and he wondered the Lord Mayor did not see to it and drive them out. He did not *so* much object to the

Dutch, but the Spaniards—no words could express his horror of them.

By and by, Ambrose going out to fetch some water from the conduit, found standing by it a figure entirely new to him. It was a young girl of some twelve or fourteen years old, in the round white cap worn by all of her age and sex; but from beneath it hung down two thick plaits of the darkest hair he had ever seen, and though the dress was of the ordinary dark serge with a coloured apron, it was put on with an air that made it look like some strange and beautiful costume on the slender, lithe, little form. The vermilion apron was further trimmed with a narrow border of white, edged again with deep blue, and it chimed in with the bright coral earrings and necklace. As Ambrose came forward the creature tried to throw a crimson handkerchief over her head, and ran into the shelter of another door, but not before Ambrose had seen a pair of large dark eyes so like those of a terrified fawn that they seemed to carry him back to the Forest. Going back amazed, he asked his companion who the girl he had seen could have been.

Will stared. "I trow you mean the old blackamoor

sword-cutler's wench. He is one of those pestilent strangers. An 'Ebrew Jew who worships Mahound and is too bad for the Spanish folk themselves."

This rather startled Ambrose, though he knew enough to see that the accusations could not both be true, but he forgot it in the delight, when Will pronounced the work done, of drawing back the curtain and feasting his eyes upon the black backs of the books, and the black-letter brochures that lay by them. There were scarcely thirty, yet he gloated on them as on an inexhaustible store, while Will, whistling wonder at his taste, opined that since some one was there to look after the stove, and the iron pot on it, he might go out and have a turn at ball with Hob and Martin.

Ambrose was glad to be left to go over his coming feast. There was Latin, English, and, alas! baffling Dutch. High or Low it was all the same to him. What excited his curiosity most was the *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* of Erasmus—in Latin of course, and that he could easily read—but almost equally exciting was a Greek and Latin vocabulary; or again, a very thin book in which he recognised the New Testament in the Vulgate. He had heard chapters of it read from the graceful stone pulpit overhanging the refectory at

Beaulieu, and, of course, the Gospels and Epistles at mass, but they had been read with little expression and no attention; and that Sunday's discourse had filled him with eagerness to look farther; but the mere reading the titles of the books was pleasure enough for the day, and his master was at home before he had fixed his mind on anything. Perhaps this was as well, for Lucas advised him what to begin with, and how to divide his studies so as to gain a knowledge of the Greek, his great ambition, and also to read the Scripture. The master was almost as much delighted as the scholar, and it was not till the curfew was beginning to sound that Ambrose could tear himself away. It was still daylight, and the door of the next dwelling was open. There, sitting on the ground cross-legged, in an attitude such as Ambrose had never seen, was a magnificent old man, with a huge long white beard, wearing, indeed, the usual dress of a Londoner of the lower class, but the gown flowed round him in a grand and patriarchal manner, corresponding with his noble, somewhat aquiline features; and behind him Ambrose thought he caught a glimpse of the shy fawn he had seen in the morning.

CHAPTER XI.

AY DI ME GRENADA.

"In sooth it was a thing to weep
If then as now the level plain
Beneath was spreading like the deep,
The broad unruffled main.
If like a watch-tower of the sun
Above, the Alpuxarras rose,
Streaked, when the dying day was done,
With evening's roseate snows."

ARCHBISHOP TRENCH.

WHEN Mary Tudor, released by death from her first dreary marriage, contracted for her brother's pleasure, had appeased his wrath at her second marriage made to please herself, Henry VIII. was only too glad to mark his assent by all manner of festivities; and English chroniclers, instead of recording battles and politics, had only to write of pageantries and tournaments during the merry May of the year 1515—a May, be it

remembered, which, thanks to the old style, was at least ten days nearer to Midsummer than our present month.

How the two queens and all their court had gone a-maying on Shooter's Hill, ladies and horses poetically disguised and labelled with sweet summer titles, was only a nine days' wonder when the Birkenholts had come to London, but the approaching tournament at Westminster on the Whitsun holiday was the great excitement to the whole population, for, with all its faults, the Court of bluff King Hal was thoroughly genial, and every one, gentle and simple, might participate in his pleasures.

Seats were reserved at the lists for the city dignitaries and their families, and though old Mistress Headley professed that she ought to have done with such vanities, she could not forbear from going to see that her son was not too much encumbered with the care of little Dennet, and that the child herself ran into no mischief. Master Headley himself grumbled and sighed, but he put himself into his scarlet gown, holding that his presence was a befitting attention to the king, glad to gratify his little daughter, and not without a desire

to see how his workmanship—good English ware—held out against "mail and plate of Milan steel," the fine armour brought home from France by the new Duke of Suffolk. Giles donned his best in the expectation of sitting in the places of honour as one of the family, and was greatly disgusted when Kit Smallbones observed, "What's all that bravery for? The tilting match quotha? Ha! ha! my young springald, if thou see it at all, thou must be content to gaze as thou canst from the armourers' tent, if Tibble there chooses to be cumbered with a useless lubber like thee."

"I always sat with my mother when there were matches at Clarendon," muttered Giles, who had learnt at least that it was of no use to complain of Smallbones' plain speaking.

"If folks cocker malapert lads at Sarum we know better here," was the answer.

"I shall ask the master, my kinsman," returned the youth.

But he got little by his move. Master Headley told him, not unkindly, for he had some pity for the spoilt lad, that not the Lord Mayor himself would take his

own son with him while yet an apprentice. Tibble Steelman would indeed go to one of the attendants' tents at the further end of the lists, where repairs to armour and weapons might be needed, and would take an assistant or two, but who they might be must depend on his own choice, and if Giles had any desire to go, he had better don his working dress.

In fact, Tibble meant to take Edmund Burgess and one workman for use, and one of the new apprentices for pleasure, letting them change in the middle of the day. The swagger of Giles actually forfeited for him the first turn, which—though he was no favourite with the men—would have been granted to his elder years and his relationship to the master; but on his overbearing demand to enter the boat which was to carry down a little anvil and charcoal furnace, with a few tools, rivets, nails, and horse-shoes, Tibble coolly returned that he needed no such gay birds; but if Giles chose to be ready in his leathern coat when Stephen Birkenholt came home at midday, mayhap he might change with him.

Stephen went joyously in the plainest of attire, though Tibble in fur cap, grimy jerkin, and leathern

apron was no elegant steersman; and Edmund, who was at the age of youthful foppery, shrugged his shoulders a little, and disguised the garments of the smithy with his best flat cap and newest mantle.

They kept in the wake of the handsome barge which Master Headley shared with his friend and brother alderman, Master Hope the draper, whose young wife, in a beautiful black velvet hood and shining blue satin kirtle, was evidently petting Dennet to her heart's content, though the little damsel never lost an opportunity of nodding to her friends in the plainer barge in the rear.

The Tudor tilting matches cost no lives, and seldom broke bones. They were chiefly opportunities for the display of brilliant enamelled and gilt armour, at the very acme of cumbrous magnificence; and of equally gorgeous embroidery spread out over the vast expanse provided by elephantine Flemish horses. Even if the weapons had not been purposely blunted, and if the champions had really desired to slay one another, they would have found the task very difficult, as in effect they did in the actual game of war. But the spectacle was a splendid one, and all the apparatus was ready in

the armourers' tent, marked by St. George and the Dragon. Tibble ensconced himself in the innermost corner with a "tractate," borrowed from his friend Lucas, and sent the apprentices to gaze their fill at the rapidly filling circles of seats. They saw King Harry, resplendent in gilded armour—"from their own anvil, true English steel," said Edmund, proudly—hand to her seat his sister the bride, one of the most beautiful women then in existence, with a lovely and delicate bloom on her fair face and exquisite Plantagenet features. No more royally handsome creatures could the world have offered than that brother and sister, and the English world appreciated them and made the lists ring with applause at the fair lady who had disdained foreign princes to wed her true love, an honest Englishman.

He—the cloth of frieze—in blue Milanese armour, made to look as classical as possible, and with clasps and medals engraven from antique gems—handed in Queen Katharine, whose dark but glowing Spanish complexion made a striking contrast to the dazzling fairness of her young sister-in-law. Near them sat a stout burly figure in episcopal purple, and at his feet

there was a form which nearly took away all Stephen's pleasure for the time. For it was in motley, and he could hear the bells jingle, while the hot blood rose in his cheeks in the dread lest Burgess should detect the connection, or recognise in the jester the grave personage who had come to negotiate with Mr. Headley for his indentures, or worse still, that the fool should see and claim him.

However, Quipsome Hal seemed to be exchanging drolleries with the young dowager of France, who, sooth to say, giggled in a very unqueenly manner at jokes which made the grave Spanish-born queen draw up her stately head, and converse with a lady on her other hand—an equally stately lady, somewhat older, with the straight Plantagenet features, and by her side a handsome boy, who, though only eight or nine years old, was tonsured, and had a little scholar's gown. "That," said Edmund, "is my Lady Countess of Salisbury, of whom Giles Headley prates so much."

A tournament, which was merely a game between gorgeously equipped princes and nobles, afforded little scope for adventure worthy of record, though it gave great diversion to the spectators. Stephen gazed like

one fascinated at the gay panoply of horse and man, with the huge plumes on the heads of both, as they rushed against one another, and he shared with Edmund the triumph when the lance from their armoury held good, the vexation if it were shivered. All would have been perfect but for the sight of his uncle, playing off his drolleries in a manner that gave him a sense of personal degradation.

To escape from the sight almost consoled him when, in the pause after the first courses had been run, Tibble told him and Burgess to return, and send Headley and another workman with a fresh bundle of lances for the afternoon's tilting. Stephen further hoped to find his brother at the Dragon court, as it was one of those holidays that set every one free, and separation began to make the brothers value their meetings.

But Ambrose was not at the Dragon court, and when Stephen went in quest of him to the Temple, Perronel had not seen him since the early morning, but she said he seemed so much bitten with the little old man's scholarship that she had small doubt that he would be found poring over a book in Warwick Inner Yard.

Thither therefore did Stephen repair. The place

was nearly deserted, for the inhabitants were mostly either artisans or that far too numerous race who lived on the doles of convents, on the alms of church-goers, and the largesses scattered among the people on public occasions, and these were for the most part pursuing their vocation both of gazing and looking out for gain among the spectators outside the lists. The door that Stephen had been shown as that of Ambrose's master was, however, partly open, and close beside it sat in the sun a figure that amazed him. On a small mat or rug, with a black and yellow handkerchief over her head, and little scarlet legs crossed under a blue dress, all lighted up by the gay May sun, there slept the little dark, glowing maiden, with her head bent as it leant against the wall, her rosy lips half open, her long black plaits on her shoulders.

Stepping up to the half-open door, whence he heard a voice reading, his astonishment was increased. At the table were his brother and his master, Ambrose with a black book in hand, Lucas Hansen with some papers, and on the ground was seated a venerable, white-bearded old man, something between Stephen's notions of an apostle and of a magician, though the latter idea

predominated at sight of a long parchment scroll covered with characters such as belonged to no alphabet that he had ever dreamt of. What were they doing to his brother? He was absolutely in an enchanter's den. Was it a pixy at the door, guarding it? "Ambrose!" he cried aloud.

Everybody started. Ambrose sprang to his feet, exclaiming, "Stephen!" The pixy gave a little scream and jumped up, flying to the old man, who quietly rolled up his scroll.

Lucas rose up as Ambrose spoke.

"Thy brother?" said he.

"Yea—come in search of me," said Ambrose.

"Thou hadst best go forth with him," said Lucas.

"It is not well that youth should study over long," said the old man. "Thou hast aided us well, but do thou now unbend the bow. Peace be with thee, my son."

Ambrose complied, but scarcely willingly, and the instant they had made a few steps from the door, Stephen exclaimed in dismay, "Who—what was it? Have they bewitched thee, Ambrose?"

Ambrose laughed merrily. "Not so. It is holy lore that those good men are reading."

"Nay now, Ambrose. Stand still—if thou canst, poor fellow," he muttered, and then made the sign of the cross three times over his brother, who stood smiling, and said, "Art satisfied, Stevie? Or wilt have me rehearse my *Credo?*" Which he did, Stephen listening critically, and drawing a long breath as he recognised each word, pronounced without a shudder at the critical points. "Thou art safe so far," said Stephen. "But sure he is a wizard. I even beheld his familiar spirit—in a fair shape doubtless—like a pixy! Be not deceived, brother. Sorcery reads backwards—and I saw him so read from that scroll of his. Laughest thou! Nay! what shall I do to free thee? Enter here!"

Stephen dragged his brother, still laughing, into the porch of the nearest church, and deluged him with holy water with such good will, that Ambrose, putting up his hands to shield his eyes, exclaimed, "Come now, have done with this folly, Stephen—though it makes me laugh to think of thy scared looks, and poor little Aldonza being taken for a familiar spirit." And Ambrose laughed as he had not laughed for weeks.

"But what is it, then?"

"The old man is of thy calling, or something like it,

Stephen, being that he maketh and tempereth sword-blades after the prime Damascene or Toledo fashion, and the familiar spirit is his little daughter."

Stephen did not however look mollified. "Sword-blades! None have a right to make them save our craft. This is one of the rascaille Spaniards who have poured into the city under favour of the queen to spoil and ruin the lawful trade. Though could you but have seen, Ambrose, how our tough English ashwood in King Harry's hand—from our own armoury too—made all go down before it, you would never uphold strangers and their false wares that *can* only get the better by sorcery."

"How thou dost harp upon sorcery!" exclaimed Ambrose. "I must tell thee the good old man's story as 'twas told to me, and then wilt thou own that he is as good a Christian as ourselves—ay, or better—and hath little cause to love the Spaniards."

"Come on, then," said Stephen. "Methought if we went towards Westminster we might yet get where we could see the lists. Such a rare show, Ambrose, to see the King in English armour, ay, and Master Headley's, every inch of it, glittering in the sun, so that one could

scarce brook the dazzling, on his horse like a rock shattering all that came against him! I warrant you the lances cracked and shivered like faggots under old Purkis's bill-hook. And that you should liefer pore over crabbed monkish stuff with yonder old men! My life on it, there must be some spell!"

"No more than of old, when I was ever for book and thou for bow," said Ambrose; "but I'll make thee rueful for old Michael yet. Hast heard tell of the Moors in Spain?"

"Moors—blackamoors who worship Mahound and Termagant. I saw a blackamoor last week behind his master, a merchant of Genoa, in Paul's Walk. He looked like the devils in the Miracle Play at Christ Church, with blubber lips and wool for hair. I marvelled that he did not writhe and flee when he came within the Minster, but Ned Burgess said he was a christened man."

"Moors be not all black, neither be they all worshippers of Mahound," replied Ambrose.

However, as Ambrose's information, though a few degrees more correct and intelligent than his brother's, was not complete, it will be better not

to give the history of Lucas's strange visitors in his words.

They belonged to the race of Saracen Arabs who had brought the arts of life to such perfection in Southern Spain, but who had received the general appellation of Moors from those Africans who were continually reinforcing them, and, bringing a certain Puritan strictness of Mohammedanism with them, had done much towards destroying the highest cultivation among them before the Spanish kingdoms became united, and finally triumphed over them. During the long interval of two centuries, while Castille was occupied by internal wars, and Aragon by Italian conquests, there had been little aggression on the Moorish borderland, and a good deal of friendly intercourse both in the way of traffic and of courtesy; nor had the bitter persecution and distrust of new converts then set in, which followed the entire conquest of Granada. Thus, when Ronda was one of the first Moorish cities to surrender, a great merchant of the unrivalled sword-blades whose secret had been brought from Damascus, had, with all his family, been accepted gladly when he declared himself ready to submit and

receive baptism. Miguel Abenali was one of the sons, and though his conversion had at first been mere compliance with his father's will and the family interests, he had become sufficiently convinced of Christian truth not to take part with his own people in the final struggle. Still, however, the inbred abhorrence of idolatry had influenced his manner of worship, and when, after half a life time, Granada had fallen, and the Inquisition had begun to take cognisance of new Christians from among the Moors as well as the Jews, there were not lacking spies to report the absence of all sacred images or symbols from the house of the wealthy merchant, and that neither he nor any of his family had been seen kneeling before the shrine of Nuestra Señora. The sons of Abenali did indeed feel strongly the power of the national reaction, and revolted from the religion which they saw cruelly enforced on their conquered countrymen. The Moor had been viewed as a gallant enemy, the Morisco was only a being to be distrusted and persecuted; and the efforts of the good Bishop of Granada, who had caused the Psalms, Gospels, and large portions of the Breviary to be translated into Arabic,

were frustrated by the zeal of those who imagined that heresy lurked in the vernacular, and perhaps that objections to popular practices might be strengthened.

By order of Cardinal Ximenes, these Arabic versions were taken away and burnt; but Miguel Abenali had secured his own copy, and it was what he there learnt that withheld him from flying to his countrymen and resuming their faith when he found that the Christianity he had professed for forty years was no longer a protection to him. Having known the true Christ in the Gospel, he could not turn back to Mohammed, even though Christians persecuted in the Name they so little understood.

The crisis came in 1507, when Ximenes, apparently impelled by the dread that simulated conformity should corrupt the Church, quickened the persecution of the doubtful "Nuevos Cristianos," and the Abenali family, who had made themselves loved and respected, received warning that they had been denounced, and that their only hope lay in flight.

The two sons, high-spirited young men, on whom religion had far less hold than national feeling, fled to

the Alpuxarra Mountains, and renouncing the faith of the persecutors, joined their countrymen in their gallant and desperate warfare. Their mother, who had long been dead, had never been more than an outward Christian; but the second wife of Abenali shared his belief and devotion with the intelligence and force of character sometimes found among the Moorish ladies of Spain. She and her little ones fled with him in disguise to Cadiz, with the precious Arabic Scriptures rolled round their waists, and took shelter with an English merchant, who had had dealings in sword-blades with Señor Miguel, and had been entertained by him in his beautiful Saracenic house at Ronda with Eastern hospitality. This he requited by giving them the opportunity of sailing for England in a vessel laden with Xeres sack; but the misery of the voyage across the Bay of Biscay in a ship fit for nothing but wine, was excessive, and creatures reared in the lovely climate and refined luxury of the land of the palm and orange, exhausted too already by the toils of the mountain journey, were incapable of enduring it, and Abenali's brave wife and one of her children were left beneath the waves of the Atlantic. With the one little girl left to him, he

arrived in London, and the recommendation of his Cadiz friend obtained for him work from a dealer in foreign weapons, who was not unwilling to procure them nearer home. Happily for him, Moorish masters, however rich, were always required to be proficients in their own trade; and thus Miguel, or Michael as he was known in England, was able to maintain himself and his child by the fabrication of blades that no one could distinguish from those of Damascus. Their perfection was a work of infinite skill, labour, and industry, but they were so costly, that their price, and an occasional job of inlaying gold in other metal, sufficed to maintain the old man and his little daughter. The armourers themselves were sometimes forced to have recourse to him, though unwillingly, for he was looked on with distrust and dislike as an interloper of foreign birth, belonging to no guild. A Biscayan or Castillian of the oldest Christian blood incurred exactly the same obloquy from the mass of London craftsmen and apprentices, and Lucas himself had small measure of favour, though Dutchmen were less alien to the English mind than Spaniards, and his trade did not lead to so much rivalry and competition.

As much of this as Ambrose knew or understood he told to Stephen, who listened in a good deal of bewilderment, understanding very little, but with a strong instinct that his brother's love of learning was leading him into dangerous company. And what were they doing on this fine May holiday, when every one ought to be out enjoying themselves?

"Well, if thou wilt know," said Ambrose, pushed hard, "there is one Master William Tindal, who hath been doing part of the blessed Evangel into English, and for better certainty of its correctness, Master Michael was comparing it with his Arabic version, while I overlooked the Latin."

"O Ambrose, thou wilt surely run into trouble. Know you not how nurse Joan used to tell us of the burning of the Lollard books?"

"Nay, nay, Stevie, this is no heresy. 'Tis such work as the great scholar, Master Erasmus, is busied on—ay, and he is loved and honoured by both the Archbishops and the King's grace! Ask Tibble Steelman what he thinks thereof."

"Tibble Steelman would think nought of a beggarly stranger calling himself a sword cutler, and practising

the craft without prenticeship or license," said Stephen, swelling with indignation. "Come on, Ambrose, and sweep the cobwebs from thy brain. If we cannot get into our own tent again, we can mingle with the outskirts, and learn how the day is going, and how our lances and breastplates have stood where the knaves' at the Eagle have gone like reeds and egg-shells—just as I threw George Bates, the prentice at the Eagle yesterday, in a wrestling match at the butts with the trick old Diggory taught me."

CHAPTER XII.

A KING IN A QUAGMIRE.

For my pastance
Hunt, sing, and dance,
My heart is set
All godly sport
To my comfort.
Who shall me let?
THE KING'S BALADE, *attributed to Henry VIII.*

LIFE was a rough, hearty thing in the early sixteenth century, strangely divided between thought and folly, hardship and splendour, misery and merriment, toil and sport.

The youths in the armourer's household had experienced little of this as yet in their country life, but in London they could not but soon begin to taste both sides of the matter. Master Headley himself was a good deal taken up with city affairs, and left the details

of his business to Tibble Steelman and Kit Smallbones, though he might always appear on the scene, and he had a wonderful knowledge of what was going on.

The breaking-in and training of the two new country lads was entirely left to them and to Edmund Burgess. Giles soon found that complaints were of no avail, and only made matters harder for him, and that Tibble Steelman and Kit Smallbones had no notion of favouring their master's cousin.

Poor fellow, he was very miserable in those first weeks. The actual toil, to which he was an absolute novice, though nominally three years an apprentice, made his hands raw, and his joints full of aches, while his groans met with nothing but laughter; and he recognised with great displeasure, that more was laid on him than on Stephen Birkenholt. This was partly in consideration of Stephen's youth, partly of his ready zeal and cheerfulness. His hands might be sore too, but he was rather proud of it than otherwise, and his hero worship of Kit Smallbones made him run on errands, tug at the bellows staff, or fetch whatever was called for with a bright alacrity that won the foremen's hearts, and it was noted that he who was really a

gentleman, had none of the airs that Giles Headley showed.

Giles began by some amount of bullying, by way of slaking his wrath at the preference shown for one whom he continued to style a beggarly brat picked up on the heath; but Stephen was good-humoured, and accustomed to give and take, and they both found their level, as well in the Dragon court as among the world outside, where the London prentices were a strong and redoubtable body, with rude, not to say cruel, rites of initiation among themselves, plenty of rivalries and enmities between house and house, guild and guild, but a united, not to say ferocious, *esprit de corps* against every one else. Fisticuffs and wrestlings were the amenities that passed between them, though always with a love of fair play so long as no cowardice, or what was looked on as such, was shown, for there was no mercy for the weak or weakly. Such had better betake themselves at once to the cloister, or life was made intolerable by constant jeers, blows, baiting and huntings, often, it must be owned, absolutely brutal.

Stephen and Giles had however passed through this ordeal. The letter to John Birkenholt had been

despatched by a trusty clerk riding with the Judges of Assize, whom Mistress Perronel knew might be safely trusted, and who actually brought back a letter which might have emanated from the most affectionate of brothers, giving his authority for the binding Stephen apprentice to the worshipful Master Giles Headley, and sending the remainder of the boy's portion.

Stephen was thereupon regularly bound apprentice to Master Headley. It was a solemn affair, which took place in the Armourer's Hall in Coleman Street, before sundry witnesses. Harry Randall, in his soberest garb and demeanour, acted as guardian to his nephew, and presented him, clad in the regulation prentice garb—"flat round cap, close-cut hair, narrow falling bands, coarse side coat, close hose, cloth stockings," coat with the badge of the Armourers' Company, and Master Headley's own dragon's tail on the sleeve, to which was added a blue cloak marked in like manner. The instructions to apprentices were rehearsed, beginning, "Ye shall constantly and devoutly on your knees every day serve God, morning and evening"—pledging him to "avoid evil company, to make speedy return when sent on his master's business, to be fair, gentle

and lowly in speech and carriage with all men," and the like.

Mutual promises were interchanged between him and his master, Stephen on his knees; the indentures were signed, for Quipsome Hal could with much ado produce an autograph signature, though his penmanship went no further, and the occasion was celebrated by a great dinner of the whole craft at the Armourers' Hall, to which the principal craftsmen who had been apprentices, such as Tibble Steelman and Kit Smallbones, were invited, sitting at a lower table, while the masters had the higher one on the daïs, and a third was reserved for the apprentices after they should have waited on their masters—in fact it was an imitation of the orders of chivalry, knights, squires, and pages, and the gradation of rank was as strictly observed as by the nobility. Giles, considering the feast to be entirely in his honour, though the transfer of his indentures had been made at Salisbury, endeavoured to come out in some of his bravery, but was admonished that such presumption might be punished, the first time, at his master's discretion, the second time, by a whipping at the Hall of his Company, and the third

time by six months being added to the term of his apprenticeship.

Master Randall was entertained in the place of honour, where he comported himself with great gravity, though he could not resist alarming Stephen with an occasional wink or gesture as the boy approached in the course of the duties of waiting at the upper board —a splendid sight with cups and flagons of gold and silver, with venison and capons and all that a City banquet could command before the invention of the turtle.

There was drinking of toasts, and among the foremost was that of Wolsey, who had freshly received his nomination of cardinal, and whose hat was on its way from Rome—and here the jester could not help betraying his knowledge of the domestic policy of the household, and telling the company how it had become known that the scarlet hat was actually on the way, but in a "varlet's budget—a mere Italian common knave, no better than myself," quoth Quipsome Hal, whereat his nephew trembled standing behind his chair, forgetting that the decorous solid man in the sad-coloured gown and well-crimped ruff, neatest of

Perronel's performances, was no such base comparison for any varlet. Hal went on to describe, however, how my Lord of York had instantly sent to stay the messenger on his landing at Dover, and equip him with all manner of costly silks by way of apparel, and with attendants, such as might do justice to his freight, "that so," he said, "men may not rate it but as a scarlet cock's comb, since all men be but fools, and the sole question is, who among them hath wit enough to live by his folly." Therewith he gave a wink that so disconcerted Stephen as nearly to cause an upset of the bowl of perfumed water that he was bringing for the washing of hands.

Master Headley, however, suspected nothing, and invited the grave Master Randall to attend the domestic festival on the presentation of poor Spring's effigy at the shrine of St. Julian. This was to take place early in the morning of the 14th of September, Holy Cross Day, the last holiday in the year that had any of the glory of summer about it, and on which the apprentices claimed a prescriptive right to go out nutting in St. John's Wood, and to carry home their spoil to the lasses of their acquaintance.

Tibble Steelman had completed the figure in bronze, with a silver collar and chain, not quite without protest that the sum had better have been bestowed in alms. But from his master's point of view this would have been giving to a pack of lying beggars and thieves what was due to the holy saint; no one save Tibble, who could do and say what he chose, could have ventured on a word of remonstrance on such a subject; and as the full tide of iconoclasm, consequent on the discovery of the original wording of the second commandment, had not yet set in, Tibble had no more conscientious scruple against making the figure, than in moulding a little straight-tailed lion for Lord Harry Percy's helmet.

So the party in early morning heard their mass, and then, repairing to St. Julian's pillar, while the rising sun came peeping through the low eastern window of the vaulted Church of St. Faith, Master Headley on his knees gave thanks for his preservation, and then put forward his little daughter, holding on her joined hands the figure of poor Spring, couchant, and beautifully modelled in bronze with all Tibble's best skill.

Hal Randall and Ambrose had both come up from the little home where Perronel presided, for the hour

was too early for the jester's absence to be remarked in the luxurious household of the Cardinal elect, and he even came to break his fast afterwards at the Dragon court, and held such interesting discourse with old Dame Headley on the farthingales and coifs of Queen Katharine and her ladies, that she pronounced him a man wondrous wise and understanding, and declared Stephen happy in the possession of such a kinsman.

"And whither away now, youngsters?" he said, as he rose from table.

"To St. John's Wood! The good greenwood, uncle," said Ambrose.

"Thou too, Ambrose?" said Stephen joyfully. "For once away from thine ink and thy books!"

"Ay," said Ambrose, "mine heart warms to the woodlands once more. Uncle, would that thou couldst come."

"Would that I could, boy! We three would show these lads of Cockayne what three foresters know of wood craft! But it may not be. Were I once there, the old blood might stir again and I might bring you into trouble, and ye have not two faces under one hood

as I have! So fare ye well, I wish you many a bagful of nuts!"

The four months of city life, albeit the City was little bigger than our moderate sized country towns, and far from being an unbroken mass of houses, had yet made the two young foresters delighted to enjoy a day of thorough country in one another's society. Little Dennet longed to go with them, but the prentice world was far too rude for little maidens to be trusted in it, and her father held out hopes of going one of these days to High Park as he called it, while Edmund and Stephen promised her all their nuts, and as many blackberries as could be held in their flat caps.

"Giles has promised me none," said Dennet, with a pouting lip, "nor Ambrose."

"Why sure, little mistress, thou'lt have enough to crack thy teeth on!" said Edmund Burgess.

"They *ought* to bring theirs to me," returned the little heiress of the Dragon court with an air of offended dignity that might have suited the heiress of the kingdom.

Giles, who looked on Dennet as a kind of needful appendage to the Dragon, a piece of property of his

own, about whom he need take no trouble, merely laughed and said, "Want must be thy master then." But Ambrose treated her petulance in another fashion. "Look here, pretty mistress," said he, "there dwells by me a poor little maid nigh about thine age, who never goeth further out than to St. Paul's minster, nor plucketh flower, nor hath sweet cake, nor manchet bread, nor sugar-stick, nay, and scarce ever saw English hazel-nut nor blackberry. 'Tis for her that I want to gather them."

"Is she thy master's daughter?" demanded Dennet, who could admit the claims of another princess.

"Nay, my master hath no children, but she dwelleth near him."

"I will send her some, and likewise of mine own comfits and cakes," said Mistress Dennet. "Only thou must bring all to me first."

Ambrose laughed and said, "It's a bargain then, little mistress?"

"I keep my word," returned Dennet marching away, while Ambrose obeyed a summons from good-natured Mistress Headley to have his wallet filled with bread and cheese like those of her own prentices.

Off went the lads under the guidance of Edmund Burgess, meeting parties of their own kind at every turn, soon leaving behind them the City bounds, as they passed under New Gate, and by and by skirting the fields of the great Carthusian monastery, or Charter House, with the burial-ground given by Sir Walter Manny at the time of the Black Death. Beyond came marshy ground through which they had to pick their way carefully, over stepping-stones—this being no other than what is now the Regent's Park, not yet in any degree drained by the New River, but all quaking ground, overgrown with rough grass and marsh-plants, through which Stephen and Ambrose bounded by the help of stout poles with feet and eyes well used to bogs, and knowing where to look for a safe footing, while many a flat-capped London lad floundered about and sank over his yellow ankles or left his shoes behind him, while lapwings shrieked pee-wheet, and almost flapped him with their broad wings, and moorhens dived in the dark pools, and wild ducks rose in long families.

Stephen was able to turn the laugh against his chief adversary and rival, George Bates of the Eagle, who

proposed seeking for the lapwing's nest in hopes of a dainty dish of plovers' eggs; being too great a cockney to remember that in September the contents of the eggs were probably flying over the heather, as well able to shift for themselves as their parents.

Above all things the London prentices were pugnacious, but as every one joined in the laugh against George, and he was, besides, stuck fast on a quaking tussock of grass, afraid to proceed or advance, he could not have his revenge. And when the slough was passed, and the slight rise leading to the copse of St. John's Wood was attained, behold, it was found to be in possession of the lower sort of lads, the black guard as they were called. They were of course quite as ready to fight with the prentices as the prentices were with them, and a battle royal took place, all along the front of the hazel bushes—in which Stephen of the Dragon and George of the Eagle fought side by side. Sticks and fists were the weapons, and there were no very severe casualties before the prentices, being the larger number as well as the stouter and better fed, had routed their adversaries, and driven them off towards Harrow.

There was crackling of boughs and filling of bags, and cracking of nuts, and wild cries in pursuit of startled hare or rabbit, and though Ambrose and Stephen indignantly repelled the idea of St. John's Wood being named in the same day with their native forest, it is doubtful whether they had ever enjoyed themselves more; until just as they were about to turn homeward, whether moved by his hostility to Stephen or by envy at the capful of juicy blackberries, carefully covered with green leaves, George Bates, rushing up from behind, shouted out "Here's a skulker! Here's one of the black guard! Off to thy fellows, varlet!" at the same time dealing a dexterous blow under the cap, which sent the blackberries up into Ambrose's face. "Ha! ha!" shouted the ill-conditioned fellow. "So much for a knave that serves rascally strangers! Here! hand over that bag of nuts!"

Ambrose was no fighter, but in defence of the bag that was to purchase a treat for little Aldonza, he clenched his fists, and bade George Bates come and take them if he would. The quiet scholarly boy was, however, no match for the young armourer, and made but poor reply to the buffets of his adversary, who had

hold of the bag, and was nearly choking him with the string round his neck.

However, Stephen had already missed his brother, and turning round, shouted out that the villain Bates was mauling him, and rushed back, falling on Ambrose's assailant with a sudden well-directed pommelling that made him hastily turn about, with cries of "Two against one!"

"Not at all," said Stephen. "Stand by, Ambrose; I'll give the coward his deserts."

In fact, though the boys were nearly of a size, George somewhat the biggest, Stephen's country activity, and perhaps the higher spirit of his gentle blood, generally gave him the advantage, and on this occasion he soon reduced Bates to roar for mercy.

"Thou must purchase it!" said Stephen. "Thy bag of nuts, in return for the berries thou hast wasted!"

Peaceable Ambrose would have remonstrated, but Stephen was implacable. He cut the string, and captured the bag, then with a parting kick bade Bates go after his comrades, for his Eagle was nought but a thieving kite.

Bates made off pretty quickly, but the two brothers tarried a little to see how much damage the blackberries had suffered, and to repair the losses as they descended into the bog by gathering some choice dewberries.

"I marvel these fine fellows 'scaped our company," said Stephen presently.

"Are we in the right track, thinkst thou? Here is a pool I marked not before," said Ambrose anxiously.

"Nay, we can't be far astray while we see St. Paul's spire and the Tower full before us," said Stephen. "Plainer marks than we had at home."

"That may be. Only where is the safe footing?" said Ambrose. "I wish we had not lost sight of the others!"

"Pish! what good are a pack of City lubbers!" returned Stephen. "Don't we know a quagmire when we see one, better than they do?"

"Hark, they are shouting for us."

"Not they! That's a falconer's call. There's another whistle! See, there's the hawk. She's going down the wind, as I'm alive," and Stephen began to bound wildly along, making all the sounds and calls by which falcons were recalled, and holding up as a lure

a lapwing which he had knocked down. Ambrose, by no means so confident in bog-trotting as his brother, stood still to await him, hearing the calls and shouts of the falconer coming nearer, and presently seeing a figure, flying by the help of a pole over the pools and dykes that here made some attempt at draining the waste. Suddenly, in mid career over one of these broad ditches, there was a collapse, and a lusty shout for help as the form disappeared. Ambrose instantly perceived what had happened, the leaping pole had broken to the downfall of its owner. Forgetting all his doubts as to bogholes and morasses, he grasped his own pole, and sprang from tussock to tussock, till he had reached the bank of the ditch or water-course in which the unfortunate sportsman was floundering. He was a large, powerful man, but this was of no avail, for the slough afforded no foothold. The further side was a steep bank built up of sods, the nearer sloped down gradually, and though it was not apparently very deep, the efforts of the victim to struggle out had done nothing but churn up a mass of black muddy water in which he sank deeper every moment, and it was already nearly to his shoulders when with a cry of joy, half choked

however, by the mud, he cried, "Ha! my good lad! Are there any more of ye?"

"Not nigh, I fear," said Ambrose, beholding with some dismay the breadth of the shoulders which were all that appeared above the turbid water.

"Soh! Lie down, boy, behind that bunch of osier. Hold out thy pole. Let me see thine hands. Thou art but a straw, but, our Lady be my speed! Now hangs England on a pair of wrists!"

There was a great struggle, an absolute effort for life, and but for the osier stump Ambrose would certainly have been dragged into the water, when the man had worked along the pole, and grasping his hands, pulled himself upwards. Happily the sides of the dyke became harder higher up, and did not instantly yield to the pressure of his knees, and by the time Ambrose's hands and shoulders felt nearly wrenched from their sockets, the stem of the osier had been attained, and in another minute, the rescued man, bareheaded, plastered with mud, and streaming with water, sat by him on the bank, panting, gasping, and trying to gather breath and clear his throat from the mud he had swallowed.

"Thanks, good lad, well done," he articulated. "Those fellows! where are they?" And feeling in his bosom, he brought out a gold whistle suspended by a chain. "Blow it," he said, taking off the chain, "my mouth is too full of slime."

Ambrose blew a loud shrill call, but it seemed to reach no one but Stephen, whom he presently saw dashing towards them.

"Here is my brother coming, sir," he said, as he gave his endeavours to help the stranger to free himself from the mud that clung to him, and which was in some places thick enough to be scraped off with a knife. He kept up a continual interchange of exclamations at his plight, whistles and shouts for his people, and imprecations on their tardiness, until Stephen was near enough to show that the hawk had been recovered, and then he joyfully called out, "Ha! hast thou got her? Why, flat-caps as ye are, ye put all my fellows to shame! How now, thou errant bird, dost know thy master, or take him for a mud wall? Kite that thou art, to have led me such a dance! And what's your name, my brave lads? Ye must have been bred to wood-craft."

Ambrose explained both their parentage and their present occupation, but was apparently heeded but little. "Wot ye how to get out of this quagmire?" was the question.

"I never was here before, sir," said Stephen; "but yonder lies the Tower, and if we keep along by this dyke, it must lead us out somewhere."

"Well said, boy, I must be moving, or the mud will dry on me, and I shall stand here as though I were turned to stone by the Gorgon's head! So have with thee! Go on first, master hawk-tamer. What will bear thee will bear me!"

There was an imperative tone about him that surprised the brothers, and Ambrose looking at him from head to foot, felt sure that it was some great man at the least, whom it had been his hap to rescue. Indeed, he began to have further suspicions when they came to a pool of clearer water, beyond which was firmer ground, and the stranger with an exclamation of joy, borrowed Stephen's cap, and, scooping up the water with it, washed his face and head, disclosing the golden hair and beard, fair complexion, and handsome square face he had seen more than once before.

He whispered to Stephen "'Tis the King!"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Henry, "hast found him out, lads? Well, it may not be the worse for ye. Pity thou shouldst not be in the Forest still, my young falconer, but we know our good city of London too well to break thy indentures. And thou——"

He was turning to Ambrose when further shouts were heard. The King hallooed, and bade the boys do so, and in a few moments more they were surrounded by the rest of the hawking party, full of dismay at the king's condition, and deprecating his anger for having lost him.

"Yea," said Henry; "an it had not been for this good lad, ye would never have heard more of the majesty of England! Swallowed in a quagmire had made a new end for a king, and ye would have to brook the little Scot."

The gentlemen who had come up were profuse in lamentations. A horse was brought up for the king's use, and he prepared to mount, being in haste to get into dry clothes. He turned round, however, to the boys, and said, "I'll not forget you, my lads. Keep that!" he added, as Ambrose, on his knee, would have given him back the whistle, "'tis a token that maybe

will serve thee, for I shall know it again. And thou, my black-eyed lad—— My purse, Howard!"

He handed the purse to Stephen—a velvet bag richly wrought with gold, and containing ten gold angels, besides smaller money—bidding them divide, like good brothers as he saw they were, and then galloped off with his train.

Twilight was coming on, but following in the direction of the riders, the boys were soon on the Islington road. The New Gate was shut by the time they reached it, and their explanation that they were belated after a nutting expedition would not have served them, had not Stephen produced the sum of twopence which softened the surliness of the guard.

It was already dark, and though curfew had not yet sounded, preparations were making for lighting the watch-fires in the open spaces and throwing chains across the streets, but the little door in the Dragon court was open, and Ambrose went in with his brother to deliver up his nuts to Dennet and claim her promise of sending a share to Aldonza.

They found their uncle in his sober array sitting by Master Headley, who was rating Edmund and Giles for having lost sight of them, the latter excusing himself

by grumbling out that he could not be marking all Stephen's brawls with George Bates.

When the two wanderers appeared, relief took the form of anger, and there were sharp demands why they had loitered. Their story was listened to with many exclamations: Dennet jumped for joy, her grandmother advised that the angels should be consigned to her own safe keeping, and when Master Headley heard of Henry's scruples about the indentures, he declared that it was a rare wise king who knew that an honest craft was better than court favour.

"Yet mayhap he might do something for thee, friend Ambrose," added the armourer. "Commend thee to some post in his chapel royal, or put thee into some college, since such is thy turn. How sayst thou, Master Randall, shall he send in this same token, and make his petition?"

"If a foo—— if a plain man may be heard where the wise hath spoken," said Randall, "he had best abstain. Kings love not to be minded of mishaps, and our Hal's humour is not to be reckoned on! Lay up the toy in case of need, but an thou claim overmuch he may mind thee in a fashion not to thy taste."

"Sure our King is of a more generous mould!" exclaimed Mrs. Headley.

"He is like other men, good mistress, just as you know how to have him, and he is scarce like to be willing to be minded of the taste of mire, or of floundering like a hog in a salt marsh. Ha! ha!" and Quipsome Hal went off into such a laugh as might have betrayed his identity to any one more accustomed to the grimaces of his professional character, but which only infected the others with the same contagious merriment. "Come thou home now," he said to Ambrose; "my good woman hath been in a mortal fright about thee, and would have me come out to seek after thee. Such are the women folk, Master Headley. Let them have but a lad to look after, and they'll bleat after him like an old ewe that has lost her lamb."

Ambrose only stayed for Dennet to divide the spoil, and though the blackberries had all been lost or crushed, the little maiden kept her promise generously, and filled the bag not only with nuts but with three red-cheeked apples, and a handful of comfits, for the poor little maid who never tasted fruit or sweets.

CHAPTER XIII.

A LONDON HOLIDAY.

"Up then spoke the apprentices tall
Living in London, one and all."
Old Ballad.

ANOTHER of the many holidays of the Londoners was enjoyed on the occasion of the installation of Thomas Wolsey as Cardinal of St. Cecilia, and Papal Legate.

A whole assembly of prelates and "lusty gallant gentlemen" rode out to Blackheath to meet the Roman envoy, who, robed in full splendour, with St. Peter's keys embroidered on back and breast and on the housings of his mule, appeared at the head of a gallant train in the papal liveries, two of whom carried the gilded pillars, the insignia of office, and two more, a scarlet and gold-covered box or casket containing the Cardinal's hat. Probably no such reception of the

dignity was ever prepared elsewhere, and all was calculated to give magnificent ideas of the office of Cardinal and of the power of the Pope to those who had not been let into the secret that the messenger had been met at Dover; and thus magnificently fitted out to satisfy the requirements of the butcher's son of Ipswich, and of one of the most ostentatious of courts.

Old Gaffer Martin Fulford had muttered in his bed that such pomp had not been the way in the time of the true old royal blood, and that display had come in with the upstart slips of the Red Rose—as he still chose to style the Tudors; and he maundered away about the beauty and affability of Edward IV. till nobody could understand him, and Perronel only threw in her "ay, grandad," or "yea, gaffer," when she thought it was expected of her.

Ambrose had an unfailing appetite for the sermons of Dean Colet, who was to preach on this occasion in Westminster Abbey, and his uncle had given him counsel how to obtain standing ground there, entering before the procession. He was alone, his friends Tibble and Lucas both had that part of the Lollard temper

which loathed the pride and wealth of the great political clergy, and in spite of their admiration for the Dean they could not quite forgive his taking part in the pomp of such a rarce show.

But Ambrose's devotion to the Dean, to say nothing of youthful curiosity, outweighed all those scruples, and as he listened, he was carried along by the curious sermon in which the preacher likened the orders of the hierarchy below to that of the nine orders of the Angels, making the rank of Cardinal correspond to that of the Seraphim, aglow with love. Of that holy flame, the scarlet robes were the type to the spiritualised mind of Colet, while others saw in them only the relic of the imperial purple of old Rome; and some beheld them as the token that Wolsey was one step nearer the supreme height that he coveted so earnestly. But the great and successful man found himself personally addressed, bidden not to be puffed up with his own greatness, and stringently reminded of the highest Example of humility, shown that he that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself be exalted. The preacher concluded with a strong personal exhortation to do righteousness and justice alike

to rich and poor, joined with truth and mercy, setting God always before him.

The sermon ended, Wolsey knelt at the altar, and Archbishop Wareham, who, like his immediate predecessors, held legatine authority, performed the act of investiture, placing the scarlet hat with its many loops and tassels on his brother primate's head, after which a magnificent *Te Deum* rang through the beautiful church, and the procession of prelates, peers, and ecclesiastics of all ranks in their richest array formed to escort the new Cardinal to banquet at his palace with the King and Queen.

Ambrose, stationed by a column, let the throng rush, tumble, and jostle one another to behold the show, till the Abbey was nearly empty, while he tried to work out the perplexing question whether all this pomp and splendour were truly for the glory of God, or whether it were a delusion for the temptation of men's souls. It was a debate on which his old and his new guides seemed to him at issue, and he was drawn in both directions—now by the beauty, order, and deep symbolism of the Catholic ritual, now by the spirituality and earnestness of the men among whom he lived. At

one moment the worldly pomp, the mechanical and irreverent worship, and the gross and vicious habits of many of the clergy repelled him; at another the reverence and conservatism of his nature held him fast.

Presently he felt a hand on his shoulder, and started, "Lost in a stud, as we say at home, boy," said the jester, resplendent in a bran new motley suit. "Wilt come in to the banquet? 'Tis open house, and I can find thee a seat without disclosing the kinship that sits so sore on thy brother. Where is he?"

"I have not seen him this day."

"That did I," returned Randall, "as I rode by on mine ass. He was ruffling it so lustily that I could not but give him a wink, the which my gentleman could by no means stomach! Poor lad! Yet there be times, Ambrose, when I feel in sooth that mine office is the only honourable one, since who besides can speak truth? I love my lord; he is a kind, open-handed master, and there's none I would so willingly serve, whether by jest or earnest, but what is he but that which I oft call him in joke—the greater fool than I, selling peace and ease, truth and hope, this life and the next, for yonder

scarlet hat, which is after all of no more worth than this jingling head-gear of mine."

"Deafening the spiritual ears far more, it may be," said Ambrose, "since *humiles exaltaverint*."

It was no small shock that there, in the midst of the nave, the answer was a bound, like a ball, almost as high as the capital of the column by which they stood. "There's exaltation!" said Randall in a low voice, and Ambrose perceived that some strangers were in sight. "Come, seek thy brother out, boy, and bring him to the banquet. I'll speak a word to Peter Porter, and he'll let you in. There'll be plenty of fooling all the afternoon, before my namesake King Hal, who can afford to be an honester man in his fooling than any about him, and whose laugh at a hearty jest is goodly to hear."

Ambrose thanked him and undertook the quest. They parted at the great west door of the Abbey, where, by way of vindicating his own character for buffoonery, Randall exclaimed, "Where be mine ass?" and not seeing the animal, immediately declared, "There he is!" and at the same time sprang upon the back and shoulders of a gaping and astonished clown who was gazing at the rear of the procession.

The crowd applauded with shouts of coarse laughter, but a man, who seemed to belong to the victim, broke in with an angry oath, and "How now, sir?"

"I cry you mercy," quoth the jester; "'twas mine own ass I sought, and if I have fallen on thine, I will but ride him to York House and then restore him. So ho! good jackass," crossing his ankles on the poor fellow's chest so that he could not be shaken off.

The comrade lifted a cudgel, but there was a general cry of "My Lord Cardinal's jester, lay not a finger on him!"

But Harry Randall was not one to brook immunity on the score of his master's greatness. In another second he was on his feet, had wrested the staff from the hands of his astounded beast of burden, flourished it round his head after the most approved manner of Shirley champions at Lyndhurst fair, and called to his adversary to "come on."

It did not take many rounds before Hal's dexterity had floored his adversary, and the shouts of "Well struck, merry fool!" "Well played, Quipsome Hal!" were rising high when the Abbot of Westminster's yeomen were seen making way through the throng,

which fell back in terror on either side as they came to seize on the brawlers in their sacred precincts.

But here again my Lord Cardinal's fool was a privileged person, and no one laid a hand on him, though his blood being up, he would, spite of his gay attire, have enjoyed a fight on equal terms. His quadruped donkey was brought up to him amid general applause, but when he looked round for Ambrose, the boy had disappeared.

The better and finer the nature that displayed itself in Randall, the more painful was the sight of his buffooneries to his nephew, and at the first leap, Ambrose had hurried away in confusion. He sought his brother here, there, everywhere, and at last came to the conclusion that Stephen must have gone home to dinner. He walked quickly across the fields separating Westminster from the City of London, hoping to reach Cheapside before the lads of the Dragon should have gone out again; but just as he was near St. Paul's, coming round Amen Corner, he heard the sounds of a fray. "Have at the country lubbers! Away with the moonrakers! Flat-caps, come on!" "Hey! lads of

the Eagle! Down with the Dragons! Adders! Snakes—s-s s-s-s!"

There was a kicking, struggling mass of blue backs and yellow legs before him, from out of which came "Yah! Down with the Eagles! Cowards! Kites! Cockneys!" There were plenty of boys, men, women with children in their arms hallooing on, "Well done, Eagle!" "Go it, Dragon!"

The word Dragon filled the quiet Ambrose with hot impulse to defend his brother. All his gentle, scholarly habits gave way before that cry, and a shout that he took to be Stephen's voice in the midst of the *mêlée*.

He was fairly carried out of himself, and doubling his fists, fell on the back of the nearest boys, intending to break through to his brother, and he found an unexpected ally. Will Wherry's voice called out, "Have with you, comrade!"—and a pair of hands and arms considerably stouter and more used to fighting than his own, began to pommel right and left with such good will that they soon broke through to the aid of their friends; and not before it was time, for Stephen, Giles, and Edmund, with their backs against the wall, were

defending themselves with all their might against tremendous odds; and just as the new allies reached them, a sharp stone struck Giles in the eye, and levelled him with the ground, his head striking against the wall. Whether it were from alarm at his fall, or at the unexpected attack in the rear, or probably from both causes, the assailants dispersed in all directions without waiting to perceive how slender the succouring force really was.

Edmund and Stephen were raising up the unlucky Giles, who lay quite insensible, with blood pouring from his eye. Ambrose tried to wipe it away, and there were anxious doubts whether the eye itself were safe. They were some way from home, and Giles was the biggest and heaviest of them all.

"Would that Kit Smallbones were here!" said Stephen, preparing to take the feet, while Edmund took the shoulders.

"Look here," said Will Wherry, pulling Ambrose's sleeve, "our yard is much nearer, and the old Moor, Master Michael, is safe to know what to do for him. That sort of cattle always are leeches. He wiled the pain from my thumb when 'twas crushed in our printing

press. Mayhap if he put some salve to him, he might get home on his own feet."

Edmund listened. "There's reason in that," he said. "Dost know this leech, Ambrose?"

"I know him well. He is a good old man, and wondrous wise. Nay, no black arts; but he saith his folk had great skill in herbs and the like, and though he be no physician by trade, he hath much of their lore."

"Have with thee, then," returned Edmund, "the rather that Giles is no small weight, and the guard might come on us ere we reached the Dragon."

"Or those cowardly rogues of the Eagle might set on us again," added Stephen; and as they went on their way to Warwick Inner Yard, he explained that the cause of the encounter had been that Giles had thought fit to prank himself in his father's silver chain, and thus George Bates, always owing the Dragon a grudge, and rendered specially malicious since the encounter on Holy Rood Day, had raised the cry against him, and caused all the flat-caps around to make a rush at the gaud as lawful prey.

"'Tis clean against prentice statutes to wear one, is it not?" asked Ambrose.

"Ay," returned Stephen; "yet none of us but would stand up for our own comrade against those meddling fellows of the Eagle."

"But," added Edmund, "we must beware the guard, for if they looked into the cause of the fray, our master might be called on to give Giles a whipping in the Company's hall, this being a second offence of going abroad in these vanities."

Ambrose went on before to prepare Miguel Abenali, and entreat his good offices, explaining that the youth's master, who was also his kinsman, would be sure to give handsome payment for any good offices to him. He scarcely got out half the words; the grand old Arab waved his hand and said, "When the wounded is laid before the tent of Ben Ali, where is the question of recompense? Peace be with thee, my son! Bring him hither. Aldonza, lay the carpet yonder, and the cushions beneath the window, where I may have light to look to his hurt."

Therewith he murmured a few words in an unknown tongue, which, as Ambrose understood, were an invocation to the God of Abraham to bless his endeavours to heal the stranger youth, but which happily were spoken

before the arrival of the others, who would certainly have believed them an incantation.

The carpet though worn threadbare, was a beautiful old Moorish rug, once glowing with brilliancy, and still rich in colouring, and the cushion was of thick damask faded to a strange pale green. All in that double-stalled partition, once belonging to the great earl's war-horses, was scrupulously clean, for the Christian Moor had retained some of the peculiar virtues born of Mohammedanism and of high civilisation. The apprentice lads tramped in much as if they had been entering a wizard's cave, though Stephen had taken care to assure Edmund of his application of the test of holy water.

Following the old man's directions, Edmund and Stephen deposited their burden on the rug. Aldonza brought some warm water, and Abenali washed and examined the wound, Aldonza standing by and handing him whatever he needed, now and then assisting with her slender brown hands in a manner astonishing to the youths, who stood by anxious and helpless, while their companion began to show signs of returning life.

Abenali pronounced that the stone had missed the eyeball, but the cut and bruise were such as to require

constant bathing, and the blow on the head was the more serious matter, for when the patient tried to raise himself he instantly became sick and giddy, so that it would be wise to leave him where he was. This was much against the will of Edmund Burgess, who shared all the prejudices of the English prentice against the foreigner—perhaps a wizard and rival in trade; but there was no help for it, and he could only insist that Stephen should mount guard over the bed until he had reported to his master, and returned with his orders. Therewith he departed, with such elaborate thanks and courtesies to the host, as betrayed a little alarm in the tall apprentice, who feared not quarter-staff, nor wrestler, and had even dauntlessly confronted the masters of his guild!

Stephen, sooth to say, was not very much at ease; everything around had such a strange un-English aspect, and he imploringly muttered, "Bide with me, Am!" to which his brother willingly assented, being quite as comfortable in Master Michael's abode as by his aunt's own hearth.

Giles meanwhile lay quiet, and then, as his senses became less confused, and he could open one eye, he

looked dreamily about him, and presently began to demand where he was, and what had befallen him, grasping at the hand of Ambrose as if to hold fast by something familiar; but he still seemed too much dazed to enter into the explanation, and presently murmured something about thirst. Aldonza came softly up with a cup of something cool. He looked very hard at her, and when Ambrose would have taken it from her hand to give it to him, he said, "Nay! *She!*"

And *she*, with a sweet smile in her soft, dark, shady eyes, and on her full lips, held the cup to his lips far more daintily and dexterously than either of his boy companions could have done; then when he moaned and said his head and eye pained him, the white-bearded elder came and bathed his brow with the soft sponge. It seemed all to pass before him like a dream, and it was not much otherwise with his unhurt companions, especially Stephen, who followed with wonder the movements made by the slippered feet of father and daughter upon the mats which covered the stone flooring of the old stable. The mats were only of English rushes and flags, and had been woven by Abenali and the child; but loose rushes strewing the

floor were accounted a luxury in the Forest, and even at the Dragon court the upper end of the hall alone had any covering. Then the water was heated, and all such other operations carried on over a curious round vessel placed over charcoal; the window and the door had dark heavy curtains; and a matted partition cut off the further stall, no doubt to serve as Aldonza's chamber. Stephen looked about for something to assure him that the place belonged to no wizard enchanter, and was glad to detect a large white cross on the wall, with a holy-water stoup beneath it, but of images there were none.

It seemed to him a long time before Master Headley's ruddy face, full of anxiety, appeared at the door.

Blows were, of course, no uncommon matter; perhaps so long as no permanent injury was inflicted, the master-armourer had no objection to anything that might knock the folly out of his troublesome young inmate; but Edmund had made him uneasy for the youth's eye, and still more so about the quarters he was in, and he had brought a mattress and a couple of men to carry the patient home, as well as Steelman, his prime minister, to advise him.

He had left all these outside, however, and advanced, civilly and condescendingly thanking the sword-cutler, in perfect ignorance that the man who stood before him had been born to a home that was an absolute palace compared with the Dragon court. The two men were a curious contrast. There stood the Englishman with his sturdy form inclining, with age, to corpulence, his broad honest face telling of many a civic banquet, and his short stubbly brown grizzled beard; his whole air giving a sense of worshipful authority and weight; and opposite to him the sparely made, dark, thin, aquiline-faced, white-bearded Moor, a far smaller man in stature, yet with a patriarchal dignity, refinement, and grace in port and countenance, belonging as it were to another sphere.

Speaking English perfectly, though with a foreign accent, Abenali informed Master Headley that his young kinsman would by Heaven's blessing soon recover without injury to the eye, though perhaps a scar might remain.

Mr. Headley thanked him heartily for his care, and said that he had brought men to carry the youth home, if he could not walk; and then he went up to the

couch with a hearty "How now, Giles? So thou hast had hard measure to knock the foolery out of thee, my poor lad. But come, we'll have thee home, and my mother will see to thee."

"I cannot walk," said Giles, heavily, hardly raising his eyes, and when he was told that two of the men waited to bear him home, he only entreated to be let alone. Somewhat sharply, Mr. Headley ordered him to sit up and make ready, but when he tried to do so, he sank back with a return of sickness and dizziness.

Abenali thereupon intreated that he might be left to his care for that night, and stepping out into the court so as to be unheard by the patient, explained that the brain had had a shock, and that perfect quiet for some hours to come was the only way to avert a serious illness, possibly dangerous. Master Headley did not like the alternative at all, and was a good deal perplexed. He beckoned to Tibble Steelman, who had all this time been talking to Lucas Hansen, and now came up prepared with his testimony that this Michael was a good man and true, a godly one to boot, who had been wealthy in his own land and was a rare artificer in his own craft.

"Though he hath no license to practise it here," threw in Master Headley, *sotto voce;* but he accepted the assurance that Michael was a good Christian, and, with his daughter, regularly went to mass; and since better might not be, he reluctantly consented to leave Giles under his treatment, on Lucas reiterating the assurance that he need have no fears of magic or foul play of any sort. He then took the purse that hung at his girdle, and declared that Master Michael (the title of courtesy was wrung from him by the stately appearance of the old man) must be at no charges for his cousin.

But Abenali with a grace that removed all air of offence from his manner, returned thanks for the intention, but declared that it never was the custom of the sons of Ali to receive reward for the hospitality they exercised to the stranger within their gates. And so it was that Master Headley, a good deal puzzled, had to leave his apprentice under the roof of the old sword-cutler for the night at least.

"'Tis passing strange," said he, as he walked back; "I know not what my mother will say, but I wish all may be right. I feel—I feel as if I had left the lad

Giles with Abraham under the oak tree, as we saw him in the miracle play!"

This description did not satisfy Mrs. Headley, indeed she feared that her son was likewise bewitched; and when, the next morning, Stephen, who had been sent to inquire for the patient, reported him better, but still unable to be moved, since he could not lift his head without sickness, she became very anxious. Giles was transformed in her estimate from a cross-grained slip to poor Robin Headley's boy, the only son of a widow, and nothing would content her but to make her son conduct her to Warwick Inner Yard to inspect matters, and carry thither a precious relic warranted proof against all sorcery.

It was with great trepidation that the good old dame ventured, but the result was that she was fairly subdued by Abenali's patriarchal dignity. She had never seen any manners to equal his, not *even* when King Edward the Fourth had come to her father's house at the Barbican, chucked her under the chin, and called her a dainty duck!

It was Aldonza, however, who specially touched her feelings. Such a sweet little wench, with the air of

being bred in a kingly or knightly court, to be living there close to the very dregs of the city was a scandal and a danger—speaking so prettily too, and knowing how to treat her elders. She would be a good example for Dennet, who, sooth to say, was getting too old for spoilt-child sauciness to be always pleasing, while as to Giles, he could not be in better quarters. Mrs. Headley, well used to the dressing of the burns and bruises incurred in the weapon smiths' business, could not but confess that his eye had been dealt with as skilfully as she could have done it herself.

END OF VOL. I.

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